The Paris Review

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Leon Edel, Robert Stone Interviews
Robert Stone Fiction; Yehuda Amichai Poetry;
Leon Edel Feature on Edmund Wilson

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"Bowles
has proven himself,
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to be one of our most serious and
authentic literary artists."
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"Paul Bowles opened the world of Hip.
He let in the murder, the drugs, the incest, the death
of the Square...the call of the orgy, the end of civilization."
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"If Paul Bowles, now seventy-four, were Japanese,
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if he were French, he would no doubt be besieged by tele-
vision crews from the literary talk show *Apostrophes*."
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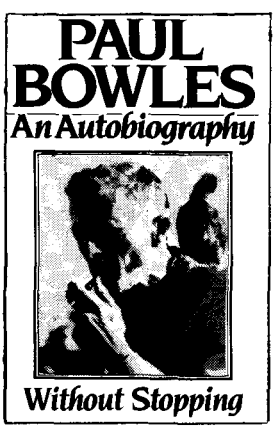

Paul Bowles's personal story is a lively history of the arts and of the writer in exile. His close friendships with Gore Vidal, Gertrude Stein, Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, Virgil Thomson and many others are detailed in *Without Stopping*. He also chronicles his marriage to Jane Bowles, their travels and eventual settlement in Tangier.

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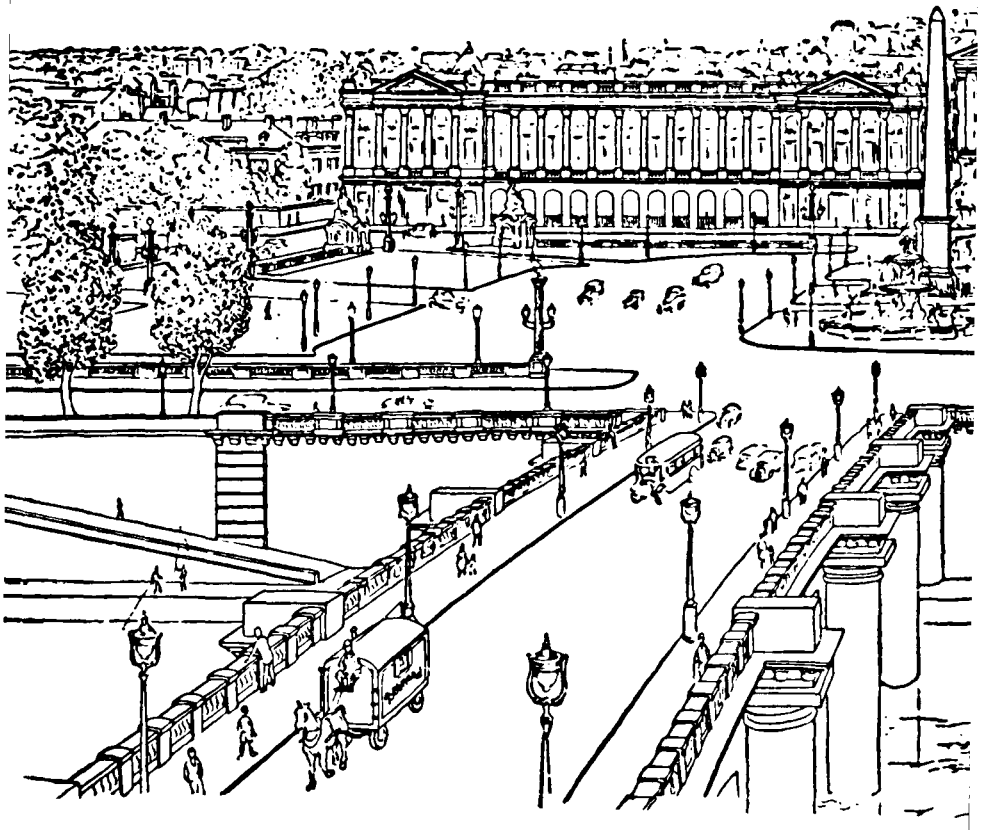

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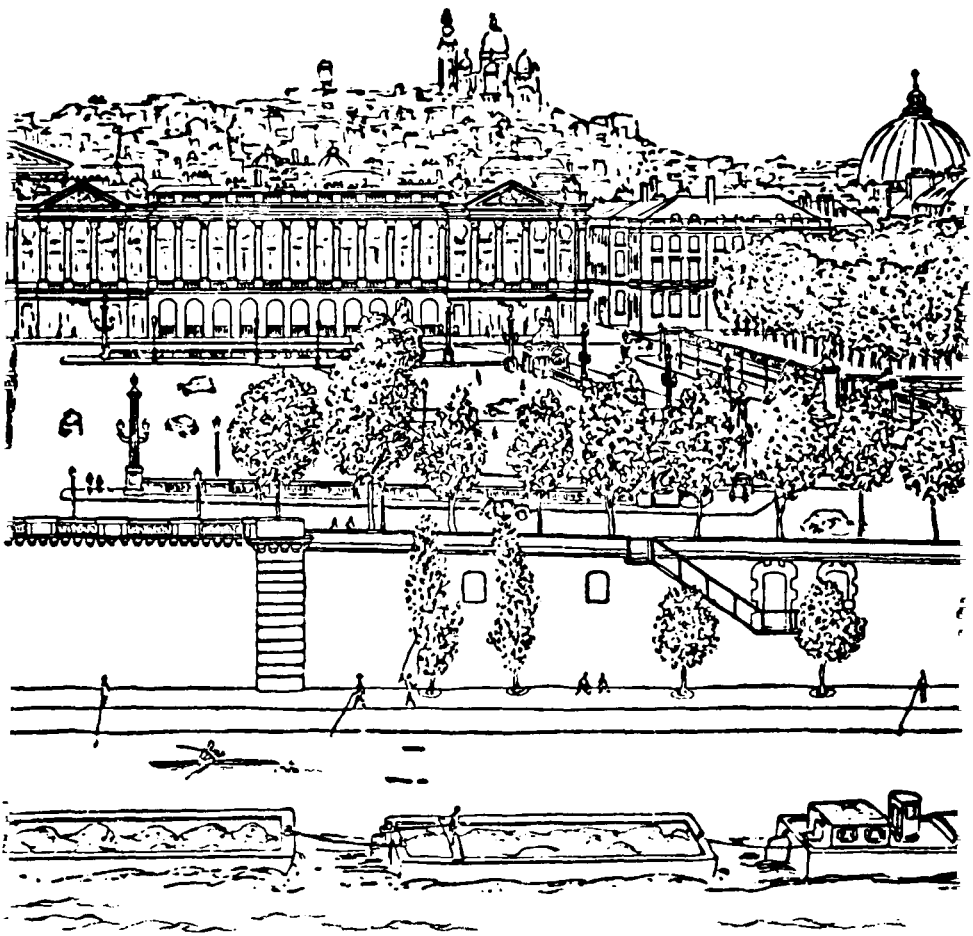

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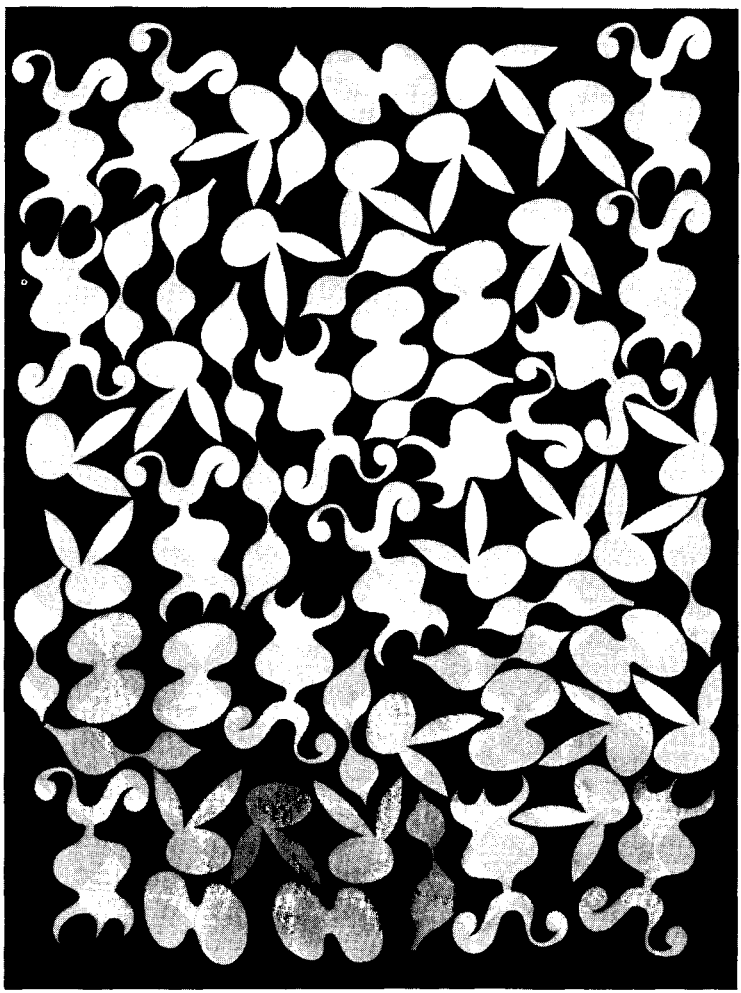

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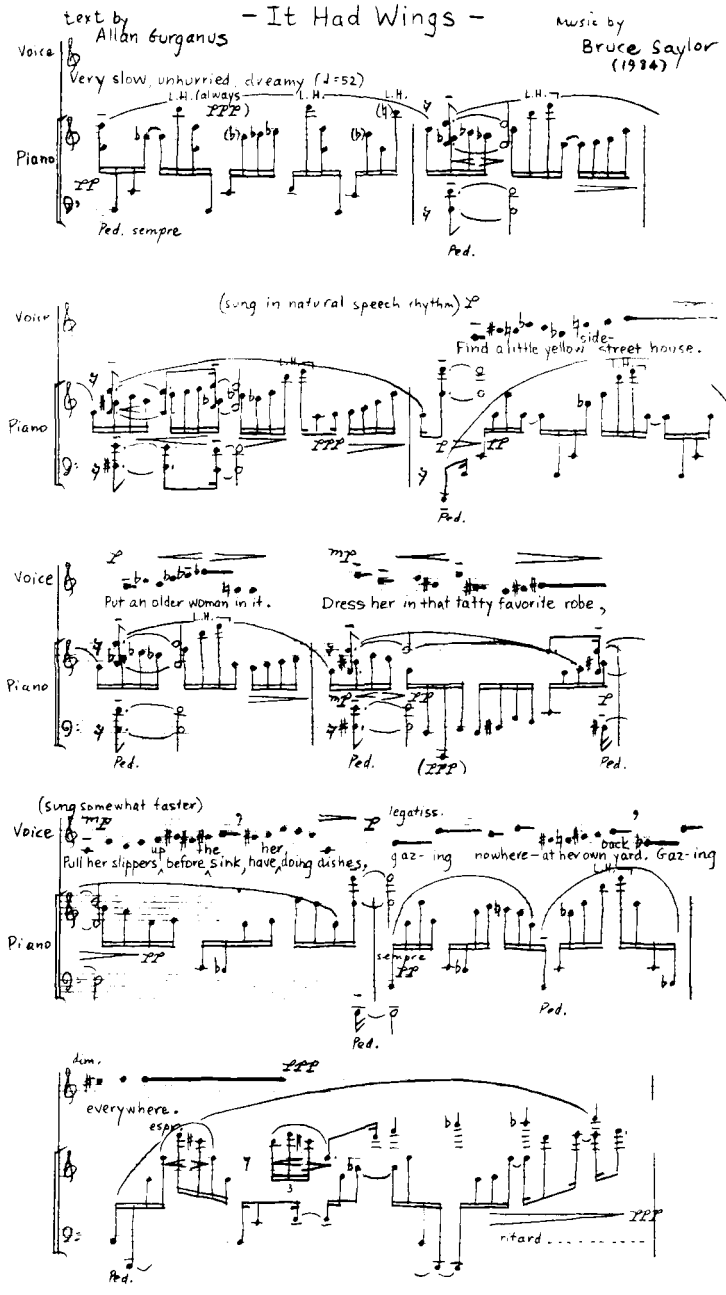

"It Had Wings" was originally commissioned by composer Bruce Saylor, who asked Allan Gurganus to write "a very short story" to be set for mezzo and soprano. The opening of the score is above. The piece had its premiere in Rome in April, 1985.

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It Had Wings

Allan Gurganus

Find a little yellow side-street house. Put an older woman in it. Dress her in that tatty favorite robe, pull her slippers up before the sink, have her doing dishes, gazing nowhere—at her own backyard. Gazing everywhere. Something falls outside, loud. One damp thwunk into new grass. A meteor? She herself (retired from selling formal clothes at Wanamaker's, she herself—a widow and the mother of three scattered sons, she herself alone at home a lot these days) goes onto tiptoe, leans across a sinkful of suds, sees—out near her picnic table, something nude, white, overly-long. It keeps shivering. Both wings seem damaged.

"No way," she says. It appears human. Yes, it is a male one. It's face up and, you can tell, it is extremely male (uncircumcised). This old woman, pushing eighty, a history of aches, uses, fun—now presses one damp hand across her eyes. Blaming strain, the lustre of new cataracts, she looks again. Still, it rests there on a bright air mattress of its own wings. Outer feathers are tough quills, broad at bottom as rowboat oars. The whole left wing bends too far under. It looks hurt.

The widow, sighing, takes up her mug of heated milk. Shaking

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her head, muttering, she carries the blue willow cup out back. She moves so slow because: arthritis. It criticizes every step. It asks—about the mug she holds, Do you really need this?

She stoops, creaky, beside what can only be a young angel, unconscious. Quick, she checks overhead, ready for what?—some T.V. news crew in a helicopter? She sees only a sky of the usual size, a Tuesday sky stretched between weekends. She allows herself to touch this thing's white forehead. She gets a mild electric shock. Then, odd, her tickled finger-joints stop aching. They've hurt so long. A practical person, she quick cures her other hand. The angel grunts but sounds pleased. His temperature's a hundred and fifty, easy—but, for him this seems somehow normal. "Poor thing," she says and—careful—pulls his heavy curly head into her lap. The head hums like a phone knocked off its cradle. She scans for neighbors—hoping they'll come out, wishing they wouldn't, both.

"Look, will warm milk help?" She pours some down him. Her wrist brushes angel-skin. Which sticks the way an ice tray begs whatever touches it. A thirty-year pain leaves her, enters him. Even her liver spots are lightening. He grunts with pleasure, soaking it all in. Bold, she presses her worst hip deep into crackling feathers. The hip has been half-numb since a silly fall last February. All stiffness leaves her. He goes, "Unhh." Her griefs seem to fatten him like vitamins. So, she whispers private woes: the Medicare cuts, the sons too casual by half, the daughters-in-law not bad but not so great. These woes seem ended. "Nobody'll believe. Still, tell me some of it," she tilts nearer. Both his eyes stay shut but his voice—like clicks from a million crickets pooled—goes, "We're just another army. We all look alike—we didn't, before. It's not what you expect. We miss this other. —Don't count on the next. Notice things here more. We wish *we* had."

"Oh," she says.

Nodding, she feels limber now, sure as any girl of twenty. Admiring her unspeckled hands, she helps him rise. Wings serve as handles. Kneeling on damp ground, she watches him go staggering toward her barbecue pit. Awkward for an athlete, really

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awkward for an angel, the poor thing climbs up there, wobbly. Standing, he is handsome, but as a vase is handsome. When he turns this way, she sees his eyes. They're silver, each reflects her: a speck, pink, on green green grass.

She now fears he plans to take her up, as thanks. She presses both palms flat to dirt, says, "The house is finally paid off. Not just yet," and smiles.

—Suddenly he's infinitely infinitely more so. Silvery. Raw. Gleaming like a sunny monument, a clock. Each wing puffs, independent. Feathers sort and shuffle like three hundred packs of playing cards. Out flings either arm; knees dip low. Then up and off he shoves—one solemn grunt. Machete-swipes cross her backyard, breezes cool her upturned face. Six feet overhead, he falters, whips in makeshift circles, manages to hold aloft then go shrub-high, get gutter-high. He avoids a messy tangle of phonelines now rocking from the wind of him. "Go, go," the widow, grinning, points the way up, "Do. Yeah, good." He signals back at her—open-mouthed and left down here. First—a glinting man-shaped kite, next an oblong of aluminum in sun. Now a new moon shrunk to decent star, one fleck, fleck's memory: usual Tuesday sky.

She kneels, panting, happier and frisky. She is hungry but must first rush over and tell Lydia next door. Then she pictures Lydia's worry-lines bunching. Lydia will maybe phone the missing sons, "Come right home. Your Mom's inventing . . . company."

—Maybe other angels have dropped into other Elm Street backyards? Behind fences, did neighbors help earlier hurt ones? Folks keep so much of the best stuff quiet.

Palms on knees, she stands, wirier. This retired saleswoman was the formal-gowns advisor to ten mayors' wives. She spent sixty years of nine-to-five on her feet. Scuffing indoors, now staring down at terry slippers, she decides, "Got to wash these next week." Can a person who's just sighted her first angel already be mulling about laundry? Yes. The world is like that.

From her sink, looking out again, she sees her own blue-willow mug in the grass. It rests in muddy ruts where the falling body struck so hard. A neighbor's collie keeps barking. (It saw!) Okay.

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This happened. "So," she says.

And plunges hands into dishwater, still warm. Heat usually helps her achy joints feel agile. Fingers don't even hurt now. The bad hip doesn't pinch one bit. And yet, sad, they will. By suppertime, they will again remind her what usual suffering means. To her nimble underwater hands, the widow—staring straight ahead—announces, "I helped. He flew off stronger. I really egged him on. Like *any*body would've, really. —Still, it was me. I'm not just somebody in a house. I'm not just somebody alone in a house. I'm not just somebody else alone in a house."

Feeling more herself, she finishes the breakfast dishes. In time for lunch. This old woman should be famous for all she has been through—today's angel, her years in sales, the sons and friends—she should be famous for her life. She knows things, she has seen so much. She's not famous.

Still, the lady keeps gazing past her kitchen café curtains, she keeps studying her own small, tidy yard. A fence, the picnic table, a barbecue pit, new Bermuda grass. Hands braced on her sink's cool edge, she tips nearer a bright window. Just in case. She seems to be expecting something, expecting something decent. Her kitchen clock is ticking. That dog still barks to calm itself. She keeps gazing out: nowhere, everywhere. Spots on her hands are darkening again. And yet, she whispers to whatever's next: "I'm right here, ready. Ready for more."

Can you guess why this woman's chin is lifted? Why does she breathe as if to show exactly how it's done? Why should both her shoulders, usually quite bent, be braced so square just now?

She is guarding the world.
Only, nobody knows.

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Poems by Yehuda Amichai

Six Poems for Tamar

1

The rain is speaking quietly,
you can sleep now.

Near my bed, the rustle of newspaper wings.
There are no other angels.

I'll wake up early and bribe the coming day
to be kind to us.

2

You had a laughter of grapes:
many round green laughs.

Your body is full of lizards.
All of them love the sun.

Flowers grew in the field, grass grew on my cheeks,
everything was possible.

3

You're always lying on
my eyes.

Every day of our life together
Ecclesiastes cancels a line of his book.

We are the saving evidence in the terrible trial.
We'll acquit them all!

4

Like the taste of blood in the mouth,
spring was upon us—suddenly.

The world is awake tonight.
It is lying on its back, with its eyes open.

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The crescent moon fits the line of your cheek,
your breast fits the line of my cheek.

5

Your heart plays blood-catch
inside your veins.

Your eyes are still warm, like beds
time has slept in.

Your thighs are two sweet yesterdays,
I'm coming to you.

All hundred and fifty psalms
roar halleluyah.

6

My eyes want to flow into each other
like two neighboring lakes.

To tell each other
everything they've seen.

My blood has many relatives.
They never visit.

But when they die,
my blood will inherit.

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Farewell,

face of you, already face of dreaming.
Wandering rises up, aloft and wild.
Face of beasts, of water, face of leaving,
grove of whispers, face of breast, of child.

No more the hour in which we two could happen,
no more for us to murmur: *now* and *all*.
You had a name of wind and raincloud, woman
of tensions and intentions, mirror, fall.

For what we didn't know, we sang together.
Changes and generations, face of night.
No longer mine, code unresolved forever,
closed-nippled, buckled, mouthed and twisted tight.

And so farewell to you, who will not slumber,
for all was in our words, a world of sand.
From this day forth, you turn into the dreamer
of everything: the world within your hand.

Farewell, death's bundles, suitcase packed with waiting.
Threads, feathers, holy chaos. Hair held fast.
For look: what will not be, no hand is writing;
and what was not the body's will not last.

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And That is Your Glory

(Phrase from the liturgy of the Days of Awe)

I've yoked together my large silence and my small outcry
like an ox and an ass. I've been through low and through high.
I've been in Jerusalem, in Rome. And perhaps in Mecca anon.
But now God is hiding, and man cries Where have you gone.
And that is your glory.

Underneath the world, God lies stretched on his back,
always repairing, always things get out of whack.
I wanted to see him all, but I see no more
than the soles of his shoes and I'm sadder than I was before.
And that is his glory.

Even the trees went out once to choose a king.
A thousand times I've given my life one more fling.
At the end of the street somebody stands and picks:
this one and this one and this one and this one and this.
And that is your glory.

Perhaps like an ancient statue that has no arms
our life, without deeds and heroes, has greater charms.
Ungird my T-shirt, love; this was my final bout.
I fought all the knights, until the electricity gave out.
And that is my glory.

Rest your mind, it ran with me all the way,
it's exhausted now and needs to knock off for the day.
I see you standing by the wide-open fridge door, revealed
from head to toe in a light from another world.
And that is my glory
and that is his glory
and that is your glory.

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Resurrection

Afterward they will get up
all together, and with a sound of chairs scraping
they will face the narrow exit.

And their clothes are crumpled
and covered with dust and cigarette ashes
and their hand discovers in the inside pocket
a ticket stub from a very previous season.

And their faces are still crisscrossed
with God's will.
And their eyes are red from so much sleeplessness
under the ground.

And right away, questions:
What time is it?
Where did you put mine?
When? When?

And one of them can be seen in an ancient
scanning of the sky, to see if rain.
Or a woman,
with an age-old gesture, wipes her eyes
and lifts the heavy hair
at the back of her neck.

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The Bull Returns

The bull returns from his day of work in the ring
after a cup of coffee with his opponents
having left them a note with his address and
the exact location of the red scarf.
The sword remains in his stiff-necked neck.
And when he's usually at home. Now
he sits on his bed, with his heavy
Jewish eyes. He knows
that the sword too is hurt when it pierces flesh.
In his next incarnation he'll be a sword: the hurt will remain.
("The door is open. If not, the key is under
the mat.")
He knows about the mercy of twilight and about the final
mercy. In the Bible, he's listed with the clean animals.
He's very kosher: chews his cud,
and even his heart is divided and cloven like a hoof.
From his chest, hairs burst forth
dry and gray, as though from a split mattress.

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National Thoughts

A woman, caught in a homeland-trap of the Chosen
People: you.
Cossack's fur hat on your head: you the
offspring of their pogroms: "After these things had come
to pass,"
always.
Or, for example, your face: slanting eyes,
eyes descended from massacre. High cheekbones
of a hetman, head of murderers.
But a mitzvah dance of hasidim,
naked on a rock at twilight,
beside the water canopies of Ein Gedi,
with eyes closed and body open like hair. After
these things had come to pass. "Always."

People caught in a homeland-trap:
to speak now in this weary language,
a language that was torn from its sleep in the Bible:
dazzled,
it wobbles from mouth to mouth. In a language that once
described
miracles and God, to say car, bomb, God.

Square letters want to stay
closed; each letter a closed house,
to stay and to close yourself in
and to sleep inside it, forever.

translated from the Hebrew
by Stephen Mitchell

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Ten miles to the south, the road on which they drove turned inland, crossed the mountains on the spine of Baja, and ran for thirty miles within sight of the Sea of Cortez. At the final curve of its eastward loop, a dirt track led from the highway toward the shore, ending at a well appointed fishing resort called Benson's Marina. At Benson's there was a large comfortable ranchhouse in the Sonoran style, a few fast powerboats rigged for big game fishing and a small air strip. Benson ran a pair of light aircraft for long distance transportation and fish spotting.

Early on during production, Lu Anne had been told about Benson's by Frank Carnehan; she and Lionel had hired Benson's son to fly them to San Lucas for a long weekend. The flight had produced much corporate anxiety after the fact because the film's insurance coverage did not apply to impromptu charter flights in unauthorized carriers. Charlie Freitag had been cross and Axelrod had been upbraided.

In the early hours of the morning, their car turned into Benson's and pulled up beside his dock. Walker had slept; a light cokey sleep, full of theatrical nightmares that had his sons in them.

Lu Anne walked straight to the lighted pier and stood next to the fuel pumps, looking out across the gulf. Walker climbed from the car and asked the driver to park it out of the way. In the shadow of the boat house, he had some more cocaine. The drug made him feel jittery and cold in the stiff ocean wind. Lu Anne had Lowndes' bottle of scotch in her tote bag, so he had a drink from it.

A Robert Stone manuscript page, from his most recent novel, Children of Light; *an indication of how barren the word processor has made examples of a work-in-progress.*

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The Art of Fiction XC
Robert Stone

Robert Stone lives in a small frame house on the Connecticut coast. Inside, a long white living room with curving walls suggests Oriental calm, and a pocket kitchen like a ship's galley offers the comic sight of tame ducks feeding on the water just below. The hesitant phrases of the Modern Jazz Quartet chime from a battered stereo flanked by bookshelves filled with fiction, philosophy, and church history. Over a built-in sofa hangs an unframed poster for Who'll Stop The Rain?, *the film Stone coauthored from his second novel,* Dog Soldiers. *Stone and his wife Janice moved into this house in*

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the fall of 1981; they have a son and daughter, grown and gone.

The novelist works in an attic room crowded with cardboard boxes and manuscripts and decorated with several brightly-colored samples of Spanish religious art. At one end of the long room, a wide window affords a view of a gray October sea; another looks down on the gravel parking lot of a clam bar. Stone writes at a table only a little larger than the word processor it supports. When his office phone rings, it may be an editor on the line begging him to cover a story, a director seeking to interest him in a new part (in the summer of 1982, Stone played Kent in a professional production of King Lear *in California), or an interviewer plaguing him with yet another question that he will answer with care and unfailing courtesy.*

The Stones have lived in many parts of the country, and for four years in London, but changes of locale have rarely altered the writer's routine: "I get up very early, drink a pot of tea, and go for as long as I can." Stone says he stops only when he has left himself a clear starting point for the following day. For weeks on end he will take few days off if his work is going well. "My imagination will still be functioning," he says with a laugh, "twelve hours after my brain is dead."

This discipline has yielded four long novels: A Hall of Mirrors *(1968),* Dog Soldiers *(1974),* A Flag For Sunrise *(1981), and most recently,* Children of Light, *which Knopf will publish in March, 1986. Each book has drawn critical acclaim, including the 1975 National Book Award for* Dog Soldiers*; each has explored some new aspect of Stone's bleak, forceful vision of an America of secret passions and social decay, a national landscape that he characteristically measures by its impact on other places: an alien Gulf Coast, Central America, South Vietnam.*

Stone grew up in New York City, joined the Navy, and later spent some years in the California counterculture as one of Ken Kesey's "Merry Pranksters." "As a young man," Stone has noted, "I made it a point to be where things were happening." He

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lives more quietly now, his free time given over to milder pleasures, such as the exploration by canoe of the salt lagoon that borders the dock behind his house. But even this quiet coast has its threat: the past summer, Stone tells me, a large shark was spotted in the lagoon, just off the docks, importing a frisson of fear into the neighborhood. The anecdote provides something of a mirror for his fiction, whose heroes are always trying to find the terms of a circumspect life while some unconditioned terror lives just below the surface.

Robert Stone is in his late forties, a trim man whose thinning hair and well-barbered beard frame a ruddy, pensive face yet to be done justice by his book jacket photos. His voice, branded by years of Scotch and smoke, was deep and serene as we began our two days of talk.

INTERVIEWER

Was there one book that started you writing?

ROBERT STONE

It was a rereading of *The Great Gatsby* that made me think about writing a novel. I was living on St. Mark's Place in New York; it was a different world in those days. I was in my twenties. I decided I knew a few meanings; I understood patterns in life. I figured, I can't sell this understanding, or smoke it, so I will write a novel. I then started to write *A Hall of Mirrors*. It must have taken me six years, a dreadful amount of time. I really began work on the novel during my Stegner Fellowship at Stanford, which brought me out to California just about the time that everything was going slightly crazy. So I spent a lot of my time, when I should have been writing, experiencing death and transfiguration and rebirth on LSD in Palo Alto. It wasn't an atmosphere that was conducive to getting a whole lot of work done.

INTERVIEWER

You once described writing your first novel as a process that paralleled your life.

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STONE

A Hall of Mirrors was something I shattered my youth against. All my youth went into it. I put everything I knew into that book. It was written through years of dramatic change, not only for me, but for the country. It covers the sixties from the Kennedy assassination through the civil rights movement to the beginning of acid, the hippies, the war . . .

INTERVIEWER

Does that mean you changed your conception of the book as you were writing it, that you tried to respond to those changes?

STONE

Yes. And to things that were happening with me. One way or another, it all went into the book. And of course it all went very slowly because once my Stegner Fellowship was over, my wife, Janice, and I had to take turns working. I'd work for twenty weeks and then be on unemployment for twenty weeks and so on. So it took me a long, long time to finish it.

INTERVIEWER

You mention responding to national as well as personal change. Do you consciously try to write about America?

STONE

Yes, I do. That is my subject. America and Americans.

INTERVIEWER

You have been cited as a writer who addresses larger social issues. Do you start with those in mind, or do you simply start out with the characters and because you have political concerns these issues naturally come out?

STONE

It is very natural. You construct characters and set them going

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in their own interior landscape, and what they find to talk about and what confronts them are, of course, things that concern you most.

INTERVIEWER

Is writing easy for you? Does it flow smoothly?

STONE

It's goddamn hard. Nobody really cares whether you do it or not. You have to make yourself do it. I'm very lazy and I suffer as a result. Of course, when it's going well there's nothing in the world like it. But it's also very lonely. If you do something you're really pleased with, you're in the crazy position of being exhilarated all by yourself. I remember finishing one section of *Dog Soldiers*—the end of Hicks's walk—in the basement of a college library, working at night, while the rest of the place was closed down, and I staggered out in tears, talking to myself, and ran into a security guard. It's hard to come down from a high in your work—it's one of the reasons writers drink. The exhilaration of your work turns into the daily depression of the aftermath. But if you heal that with a lot of Scotch you're not fit for duty the next day. When I was younger I was able to use hangovers, but now I have to go to bed early.

INTERVIEWER

You really think of yourself as lazy?

STONE

Well, my books aren't lazy books, but I have a lazy way of working. I do a very rough first draft and then a second and sometimes I have to do a third because I didn't take the trouble to really organize the first. And I take breaks between drafts. And I do altogether too much traveling.

INTERVIEWER

You have gone for relatively long periods of time between

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books. Seven years between *A Hall of Mirrors* and *Dog Soldiers*, and then another seven before *A Flag For Sunrise*. Are you writing all that time?

STONE

It seems to me that I am. I was working all those years on *A Flag For Sunrise*. I could probably have gotten six books out of my three if I'd wanted to do smaller themes. Twice as many books and they would have been half as good. Six so-so books. I don't need that. I like big novels; I really admire the grand slam.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have any special requirements, conditions necessary for your working environment?

STONE

Well, of course, I find ways to delay the day as much as possible, but there are no particular rituals connected with that for me, like having a special coffee cup or sharpening six pencils. I do need physical order, because I'm addressing the insubstantiality of structures—that's where the blank page starts. No top, no bottom, no sides. I find it hard to sit still. I pace a lot. I've got to have a pen in my hand when I'm not actually typing.

INTERVIEWER

You mostly type?

STONE

Yes, until something becomes elusive. Then I write in longhand in order to be precise. On a typewriter or word processor you can rush something that shouldn't be rushed—you can lose nuance, richness, lucidity. The pen compels lucidity.

INTERVIEWER

Do you read work aloud to yourself?

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STONE

No. My inner ear is very accurate. I know what the writing sounds like.

INTERVIEWER

Your prose is very rich in sensual detail—imagery intensified by the cadence of the sentence.

STONE

I use the white space. I'm interested in precise meaning and in reverberation, in associative levels. What you're trying to do when you write is to crowd the reader out of his own space and occupy it with yours, in a good cause. You're trying to take over his sensibility and deliver an experience that moves from mere information.

INTERVIEWER

I see that. But one of the things I respond to most in your writing is the tremendous particularity, your way of relating language to reality. It seems to me that there's a danger, if language takes the reader too far into cosmic preoccupations, of losing that immediacy.

STONE

The object is to make a connection between your characters and the contour of things as they are. The danger is of becoming pretentious. And yet it's necessary that a given dramatized scene have a richness of reference. Take a basic philosophical question: why is there something rather than nothing? Two people in love, two people in a battle to the death, refer to that question. To say so directly is preposterous; you have to get there along the path of your art. How do you relate events to that basic question? You choose words that open up deeper and deeper levels of existence by sustaining a sound which perfectly serves the narrative and which at the same time relates through a series of associations to the larger questions.

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INTERVIEWER

That would account for the shifting levels of your rhetoric, which plays the colloquial against high ornamentation. The effect is a constant tone of irony.

STONE

Irony is my friend and brother. "To know true things by what their mockeries be." There's only one subject for fiction or poetry or even a joke: *how it is*. In all the arts, the payoff is always the same: recognition. If it works, you say that's real, that's truth, that's life, that's the way things are. "There it is."

INTERVIEWER

The classic aphorism of the Vietnam war.

STONE

Exactly.

INTERVIEWER

I understand one article you filed from Vietnam was about a Saigon rock festival. That certainly puts two worlds of the time together.

STONE

That was a funny scene. Stoned rear-echelon GIs and a Vietnamese band that was a phonocopy of The Grateful Dead. Meanwhile, a light plane kept circling overhead streaming a Christian banner attacking rock as the devil's music. There was an oncoming monsoon and the banner kept threatening to foul the guy's propeller. Finally he fell out of sight and everybody waited for the crash, which didn't come. I remember one very stoned GI saying to another, "There it is."

INTERVIEWER

You were a correspondent in Vietnam in 1971 . . .

STONE

Well, I was there less than two months, but every day was

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different. It was the kind of place where anything could have happened. There's nothing that couldn't have happened there. If you encountered choirs of seraphim up the river or if somebody said he'd just seen a vision of St. George on Hill 51, you'd just say, "There it is". . . . I was in Saigon a lot of the time. I did get deeper into I Corps, and I was in Cam Rahn Bay. But in Saigon I picked up with a guy who was involved in the dope trade there and in a very short time I had found out more than I really wanted to know. It was very frightening. I should also say that this period—1971—was a time when, in the line, there was not a lot of combat involving American troops. There was rocketing up around Phu Bai, there were some bombs going off in Saigon, but nobody was quite sure who was responsible for them. American troops were not heavily engaged. It was the time of Vietnamization. The talks were going on in Paris, and American troops were being kept out of the line to keep the casualty rates down.

INTERVIEWER

Was Vietnam your first experience of war?

STONE

No, I first saw war when I was in the Navy, in the Mediterranean, in 1956. I saw the French air attack on Port Said—jets from the carrier *Lafayette* coming in right on top of our radar mast and shelling. Those multicolored tracers in the night that I saw again in Vietnam I saw with something like nostalgia. But it was quite horrible. You could look through the glasses and see donkeys and people flying through the air, chewed up by 7.62s and rockets. It was a slaughter of civilians. But it always is.

INTERVIEWER

Are you interested in observing future wars, or have you had enough?

STONE

I don't know. There was a wonderful expression soldiers had

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in the American Civil War that captures the strangeness of combat, the charm—they called it "going to see the elephant." There are times when I feel that once you've seen war, you want to see it again.

INTERVIEWER

It seems to me that your work is in the tradition of twentieth-century fiction that takes war as its principal metaphor for our lives. Would you say that war is the most complete description of our situation?

STONE

It's literally true that the world is seen by the superpowers as a grid of specific targets. We're all on military maps. There happens to be no action in those zones at present, but they're there. And then there are the wars we fight with ourselves in our own cities. It is the simple truth that, wherever you are, there is an armed enemy present, not far away.

INTERVIEWER

I'd like to ask a little about your evolution as a writer.

STONE

My early life was very strange. I was a solitary; radio fashioned my imagination. Radio narrative always has to embody a full account of both action and scene. I began to do that myself. When I was seven or eight, I'd walk through Central Park like Sam Spade, describing aloud what I was doing, becoming both the actor and the writer setting him into the scene. That was where I developed an inner ear.

INTERVIEWER

So you grew up in New York?

STONE

For the most part we were in New York, my mother and I. It was just the two of us. My mother was, I now realize, schizophrenic, and sometimes she was better than at other times.

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She lost a job as a schoolteacher in New York for medical reasons; she had a very small pension, and when she was very ill, there was really no place for me to go. Except this place that was, well, it functioned partly as a day school. My mother was in and out of hospitals. I was in an orphanage run by the Marist brothers from the age of six until just before I was ten.

INTERVIEWER

I wonder how her schizophrenia influenced your imagination.

STONE

I wonder that too. I am not really sure. One thing I know is that I usually can recognize schizophrenics when I see them. There is a certain way of speaking. I am talking about functioning schizophrenics, professional people; there are a lot of them around. It is very hard to talk about it in the abstract. In California, years ago, I had a doctor who would tell me these rather askew anecdotes that didn't seem to have any point. What it reminded me of was my mother's disconnection. Their associative patterns seemed to be similar. I finally realized what his problem was. He was about halfway into another kind of reality, but at the same time he was a doctor, functioning as a GP.

INTERVIEWER

Lu Anne, the heroine of *Children of Light*, is schizophrenic.

STONE

Lu Anne's condition is based on what I have experienced with people. There are people who have delusional systems they are really quite aware of and treat as nemeses. That is Lu Anne's condition; she has a lot of insight into her own delusional systems. Actually, many people have that, and I have been waiting a long time to write about it. It seems to be part of how I see things. I think that is partly because of my mother, whom I liked very much, but who was very difficult for me to understand. When she was my contact person for reality, for information about the world, I got some confusing signals.

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INTERVIEWER

Have you ever written about your childhood?

STONE

I don't write about my childhood or New York; I have hardly any references to it at all. In a way, that's because I always used my imagination as a kind of alternative life when I wanted to be in another place than the one I was in. I just didn't want to write about that stuff. I wanted to enjoy myself. I wasn't ready to write about it; perhaps I'm not ready to write about it yet.

INTERVIEWER

Did you read in the Navy?

STONE

Yes. Everybody on a ship reads, whether it's comic books, or Westerns, or the Bible, or whatever. They always read a lot. I was reading *Moby Dick*, which sounds terribly precious, but I thought if you can't read *Moby Dick* in the roaring forties, you'll never read *Moby Dick*. So I brought it along. I also read *Ulysses* on the same trip. I seem to have imprinted the ocean in a very strong way because I end up with all these marine images that just seem so readily at hand for me.

INTERVIEWER

Many people think of you as having a considerable grasp on the major shift in American culture from the Beats in the fifties to the sixties' counterculture.

STONE

I was in the right place at the right time to see that. It started out with Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* while I was still in the Navy. My mother recommended the book to me. I am probably the only person who had *On the Road* recommended to him by his mother. It is very hard to go back and think about what *On the Road* was saying to me. I pick it up now and all I can see is Neal Cassady. I got to know him. It was a wonderful rendering of him, but I don't see much else in it. Now it just

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reminds me of somebody writing on speed. That may be uncharitable, but frankly I find it very sentimental. As I say, I am not sure what it was that moved me. I suppose there was that tradition of the American road. I can almost remember what that was like. Thinking about the great continent out there and the city intersections, that myth of the roadside traveler. It reminded me of how every once in a while my mother and I would take off on some migration to where things were going to be better, like Chicago or wherever. We went all the way to New Mexico. I can't remember what we were in quest of. We were in quest of something though. We usually ended up on welfare, then trying to get out of wherever we were. One time we went to Chicago and ended up in a Salvation Army shelter on the North Side because we ran out of money. We stayed for as long as the Salvation Army would keep us, and then somehow my mother scraped together money to get back to New York. When we got back, we spent two nights sleeping on a roof. It was wild, you know. It was useful. On the one hand, it gave me a fear of chaos, and on the other hand, it was a romance with the world and bus stations and things like that.

INTERVIEWER

You didn't finish college, did you?

STONE

No, I started at New York University and hung on for about a year, but I couldn't stay with it. I was working at *The Daily News* at night and trying to go to classes in the daytime and I just couldn't do it, so I dropped out. In Greenwich Village, a lot of stuff was happening then. Janice worked in the Figaro and she also worked at the Seven Arts on Forty-third and Ninth Avenue. The Seven Arts, of course, was where Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg and Ray Bremser and all those other guys with droopy expressions were regulars. I kind of hung out smoking lots of cigarettes, looking very cool, listening to Coltrane. Janice and I were both at NYU until I quit. She had another job as a guidette in the RCA Building. We both got out about one o'clock, I from *The Daily News*. She took off her guidette uniform and put

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on her black stockings and was a waitress in the Seven Arts where I'd go to hang out.

INTERVIEWER

Were you writing poetry at that time?

STONE

Yes, I was writing it, and reading, and hanging out, though I didn't have too much time to hang out. I had to assume a languid posture in a hurry because I had to be up early in the morning. I really felt that hanging out was the price I had to pay, whether I wrote anything or not; these were the people who were more like me or what I wanted to be. One had the sense in those days that it was a relatively small thing, not mass bohemia like you had in the sixties. There was a lot of marijuana and you could really go to jail for years; we all thought it was very decadent and terrific of us. There was an espresso place on Sixth Street between First and Second avenues run by a guy named Baron, who was a follower of Ayn Rand—he had a dollar sign outside his cafe. Baron sold peyote buttons. It was very hard to eat peyote; you had to put it into a Waring blender and do all sorts of things to get enough down. I remember being on peyote and seeing a wrestling match for *The Daily News* in Madison Square Garden; seeing this on peyote may have changed my life. Once I got my Stegner and got out to California, I happened to collide with Ken Kesey; he lived just a couple of streets away. That whole scene was just ready to take off. And I thought I knew all about peyote and drugs and such. It didn't bother me to experiment. Kesey had a job as an orderly in the Veteran's Hospital and he was involved in the first experiments that were being conducted in psychedelic drugs. He was a volunteer and so was his friend Vic Lovell, who is a psychologist now. They were doing all these crazy drugs on an experimental basis. Some of them worked, some of them did not. I can remember really off-the-wall things called IT290s; they didn't even have names they were so arcane. Whatever IT290 was, I remember walking through the woods and suddenly encountering this huge locomotive, a green locomotive with gold trim, a very

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detailed hallucination which I remember particularly well. I still have a lot of friends out there, people who I went through that stuff with.

INTERVIEWER

Were your friends important to your work at that point?

STONE

The whole scene probably set me a back a year or two, but my friends were certainly important in my life. California in the early sixties was really quite wonderful. It seemed so civilized and so easygoing; really it was fun when the strangest thing around was us, and we were pretty harmless.

INTERVIEWER

A Hall of Mirrors is a cohesive book, considering the conditions under which it was written and the long span of time . . .

STONE

It was necessary that it be cohesive. I was looking for a vision of America, for a statement about the American condition. I was after a book that would be as ambitious as possible. I wanted to be an American Gogol if I could, I wanted to write *Dead Souls*. All of the characters represent ideas about America, about an America in a period of extraordinary, vivid transition.

INTERVIEWER

In a way, it seems to me that the novel is a kind of counterpart to *On the Road*.

STONE

On the Road twenty years after. In a way. Yes.

INTERVIEWER

Certainly Ray Hicks in *Dog Soldiers* has some biographical touches drawn from the same Neal Cassady who appeared as Dean Moriarty in *On the Road*. Did you know Kerouac when you were hanging out with Kesey—"on the bus"?

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STONE

I didn't know him well. And I didn't travel on the bus. I saw the bus off and greeted the bus when it arrived on Riverside Drive. We went to a party where Kerouac and Ginsberg and Orlovsky and those guys were, and Kerouac was at his drunken worst. He was also very jealous of Neal, who had shifted his allegiance to Kesey. But Neal was pretty exhausted, too. I saw some films taken on the bus—Neal looked like he was tired from trying to keep up with the limitless energy of all those kids. Anyway . . . Kerouac at that party was drunk and pissed off, a situation I understand very well. The first thing I ever said to him was, "Hey, Jack, have you got a cigarette?" And he said, "I ain't gonna give you no fucking cigarette, man, there's a drugstore on the corner, you can go down there and buy a fucking pack of cigarettes, don't ask me for cigarettes." That's my Kerouac story.

INTERVIEWER

That's a sad story. The passing of the torch. Is Tom Wolfe's book on Kesey, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, a pretty good picture of that whole scene?

STONE

It's amazingly good. It also forces a coherence on that scene that it didn't necessarily have. I mean that stuff was all so ephemeral, there was no philosophical core to it, particularly, it was all just goofiness.

INTERVIEWER

Well, the Wolfe book on Kesey does convey—or impose—the notion of religious quest.

STONE

It's hard to stay away from religion when you mess with acid.

INTERVIEWER

Neal Cassady as a figure on that scene does more than form an historical link between the Beat Generation and the coun-

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terculture. He also carries on the image of the affectless sociopath as a major American cultural type, a figure of particular interest to you in your fiction.

STONE

Well, Cassady was a benign version of that figure. Gary Gilmore may be closer to what I mean, a vicious drifter of the kind America seems to produce in greater quantity than does any other country, probably because there is no moral center to our middle class. This society is so fractured. It never really had that period of high bourgeois cultural development that most European countries had. The American underclass has never had the tradition and stability of a European peasantry so it could never develop feudal loyalties. Instead we get these institutionalized personalities whose arrested emotions oblige them to mimic mood, feeling, love. This is the origin of their violence.

INTERVIEWER

Such people will always constitute the night side of a counterculture. Charles Manson. Gilmore. Figures like Kesey and Kerouac draw forth its princes and saints.

STONE

I think cultural undergrounds develop in the void left by the abdication of the official culture. During the sixties, so many august institutions seemed to have no self-confidence. The universities, corporations, the very fabric of the state. Everything you pushed just seemed to fall over. Everything was up for grabs. For me, the counterculture was like a party that spilled out into the world until one had the odd feeling in society that one was walking around looking at the results of a party that had ended a few years before—a big experiment. But there was no program, everybody wanted different things. I think Kesey wanted a cultural revolution the nature of which was uncertain, he was just making it up as he went along. Other people were into political reform. Others thought the drugs would fix it all. Peace and love and dope.

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INTERVIEWER

There's a lot of dope, and an epic amount of drinking in your books—

STONE

I can't stop them from doing it. I just can't. It's getting ridiculous. I get laughed at for the volume of chemicals that gets consumed, the amount of dope and booze. And now this guy's doing it again in my new book.

INTERVIEWER

Whom do you consider your literary forebears?

STONE

My "forebears" are unsurprising. The great masters, the late Victorians; more Hemingway and Fitzgerald than Faulkner. I like Céline and Nathanael West and Dos Passos. I can't really begin to characterize my own style beyond saying that it closely reflects my thinking, my world view. But in my first novel, I felt pretty free—I was all over the lot. And I did try as forcefully as I could to invent a voice. It's filled with influences and echoes, but it's mine, as nearly as I can make it so. I began *A Hall of Mirrors* as a realistic novel, but my life changed and the world changed and when I thought about it I realized that "realism" was a fallacy. It's simply not tenable. You have to write a poem about what you're describing. You can't render, can't dissect. Zola was deluded.

INTERVIEWER

Those remarks suggest an affinity with writers like John Barth and William Gass and Donald Barthelme. But I don't really see you in that camp.

STONE

My difference with those writers is that they take realism too seriously and so have to react against it. I don't feel the necessity of reacting against it. I don't believe in it to start with. Realism as a theory of literature is meaningless. I can start with

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it as a mode precisely because I don't believe in it. I *know* it's all a world of words—what else could it be? I had the curious luck to be raised by a schizophrenic, which gives one a tremendous advantage in understanding the relationship of language to reality. I had to develop a model of reality in the face of being conditioned to a schizophrenic world. I had to sort out causality for myself. My mother's world was pure magic. And because I had no father I eventually went into a sort of orphanage when my mother could no longer cope. So at the age of six I went into an institution, which taught me to be a listener. I had to deal with all the ways people were coming on to me, had to listen to all their trips and sort them out. Realism wasn't an issue because there wasn't any. I always had a vaguely dreamlike sense of things. There was no strong distinction for me between objective and imaginative worlds.

INTERVIEWER

Life was failing to provide you with coherent narrative.

STONE

That's right. Life wasn't providing narrative so I had to. I had very little personal mythology of my own.

INTERVIEWER

All this suggests some intricate connections among living and writing and acting. Many of your characters seem preoccupied with the shifting roles in their lives: who am I here?

STONE

Yes. And my becoming a writer was my answer to that question. It was an absolute necessity. I had to create somebody significant or I would have been swept away. I've been known to say, not altogether facetiously, that life is a means of extracting fiction. If I start out with the claim that I tell stories to serve life, it's easy enough to reverse the terms.

INTERVIEWER

The characters in your books are often writers, but of forms

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other than fiction. Can you speak a bit about your own work in other forms?

STONE

I intend to write a play. I'd direct a film if the chance came my way. But with those forms too many other people get their hands on your work. The joy of fiction is its autonomy. You take the risks, you take the rap.

INTERVIEWER

Has your work as a screenwriter taught you anything about writing novels?

STONE

No. My screenplays have had no influence on my fiction. But many writers of my generation, which was spared television in its youth, grew up with their sense of narrative influenced by the structure of film. And you can go back much earlier to see that. Joyce, for example. Interestingly, Dickens seems to have anticipated the shape of the movies—look at the first few pages of *Great Expectations*.

INTERVIEWER

When you think of the writers of your generation, do you find a special constellation of contemporaries where you locate yourself?

STONE

Not really. I think more of generations of readers—for me, people who had some intense experience of the sixties. That's a generation I address. I share their concerns, their history. I get a certain amount of mail that reflects that. But there are no writers I'm aware of who are doing the same sort of thing I'm doing because I take seriously questions that the culture has largely obviated. In a sense, I'm a theologian. And so far as I know I'm the only one.

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INTERVIEWER

Does this connect in a way to what you've called the fractured state of American letters?

STONE

You have famous writers, but there's no center. There are the best-seller writers, who are anonymous, almost industrial figures. You have writers who write primarily for other writers. And you have writers with their separate and different constituencies. But American fiction is not in a state of high health. This has something to do with the economic exigencies of publishing, of course. There's a lot of pressure on the noncommercial novel, on what publishers call marginal fiction. Fewer first novels are published, fewer books of any real quality that don't seem immediately bankable. This has to show itself in a kind of reduced, duller national literature, at least for the near future.

INTERVIEWER

As far as best-selling fiction is concerned—

STONE

The best-seller list has always for the most part been the work of hacks, but in the past there seems to have been more space for serious writers. The pressure that's squeezing them out is dangerous and worrying. At the same time there are all these academic writing programs turning out the new second lieutenants of literature, and some of them somehow do manage to get published.

INTERVIEWER

All of your books offer the same general structure: multiple characters, introduced at disparate points woven slowly together until the principals collide. How is that done in the writing? Is one figure followed nearly to the end, or is each scene treated in what will be its final sequence?

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STONE

The latter. To run all those lines out one at a time would quickly turn stale. You have to be able to surprise yourself. In *Dog Soldiers*, for example, I didn't know Hicks was going to shoot Dieter until the day I wrote it. I just began writing their dialogue until it became inevitable. I was always attracted to the idea of bringing different elements together. One of my favorite radio programs was "Tell Me A Story," in which people were presented with three things to weave into one.

INTERVIEWER

As material emerges, do you control it with an outline? Charts, notebooks, things like that?

STONE

The only thing I do is make a short list that indicates sequence, very loosely. And then I sometimes jumble the stuff once I've got it written.

INTERVIEWER

You juxtapose sequences in ways you hadn't planned on?

STONE

Yes. Literally juggle them. But I don't use charts or notes.

INTERVIEWER

You don't plot through to a conclusion?

STONE

I know the beginning and usually the end. My problem is the middle—the second act, so to speak.

INTERVIEWER

At what point in the process of a book is your consciousness of technique strongest, as opposed to times when the sheer energy of invention carries you along?

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STONE

There are always certain metaphorical events that have to carry special weight. My stress on technique will be strongest when I encounter them. But there's no point at which the pleasure of invention justifies you in self-indulgence. You can never give yourself a break, you always have to make the hardest decisions. That means, for example, writing a brilliant passage and then throwing it away if there's no use for it in terms of the total design. It means scorning to find a clever way around problems that must be grappled with. There are times you have to take the chance that you may derail the structure of your book.

INTERVIEWER

Can you give an example?

STONE

Well, the meeting of the revolutionaries in *A Flag For Sunrise* broke some rules of structure. They invaded the order of the book—for good reason—and then were never seen again. That scene was tough, I had to rewrite it a lot. The scene of Naftali's suicide—I must have rewritten that eight times. And cut it to the bone. In the book, it's only a fourth as long as it was in earlier drafts. All kinds of great lines—they had to go. It took forever. I couldn't get it right for the longest time. And when I reread it in the finished book, I thought it was awful. I was desolate. But Janice persuaded me that the scene was good. I always feel desolate when I finish a book. I thought that *A Flag For Sunrise* had some good scenes, but it troubled me overall. I fell into a great depression.

INTERVIEWER

Has there ever been a negative criticism of your work that you found useful?

STONE

Well, I've seen negative positions I could respect. But I don't

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know that I learned anything from them. Negative criticism of my work tends to be very vitriolic.

INTERVIEWER

The religious element in your work often asserts itself in classic existential form—for example, Hicks's ideal of ideas embodied in action, or Holliwell's remark in *A Flag For Sunrise*, "There's always a place for God—there's some question as to whether he's in it." This seems a near reflection of Heidegger's assertion that he is neither theistic nor atheistic but adrift in a world from which God is absent.

STONE

I feel a very deep connection to the existentialist tradition of God as an absence—not a meaningless void, but a negative presence we live in terms of. I do have the sense of a transcendent plane from which I'm barred and I want to play off of it. If it's there, I'll get one sound. If it's not, I'll get a different sound.

INTERVIEWER

Was the Catholic orphanage the start of your religious opinions?

STONE

Yes. I felt very rebellious. Every once in a while I would get very angry at the whole structure, although I guess I believed it. I was in that very difficult position you get in when you really believe in God, and at the same time you are very angry: God is this huge creature who we must know, love and serve, though actually you feel like you want to kick the son of a bitch. The effect on me was I felt I was just doing things wrong.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have a fully articulated theory of fiction? In the sense, say, that Conrad framed his in the preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*?

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STONE

"Fiction must justify itself in every line." Yes. I'm beginning to frame one—and along rather Conradian lines. Prose fiction must first of all perform the traditional functions of storytelling. We *need* stories. We can't identify ourselves without them. We're always telling ourselves stories about who we are: that's what history is, what the idea of a nation or an individual is. The purpose of fiction is to help us answer the question we must constantly be asking ourselves: who do we think we are and what do we think we're doing?

INTERVIEWER

This quest can, on the part of some of your characters, particularly the more blighted or thwarted, take very brutal forms. Think of Rheinhardt, in *A Hall of Mirrors*, who can't seem to make America deliver on the American dream.

STONE

What I'm always trying to do is define that process in American life that puts people in a state of anomie, of frustration. The national promise is so great that a tremendous bitterness is evoked by its elusiveness. That was Fitzgerald's subject, and it's mine. So many people go bonkers in this country—I mean, they're doing all the right things and they're still not getting off.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think those expectations will be changed by the economic fact that most Americans will probably live in somewhat more straitened circumstances for some years to come?

STONE

I'm not sure. I think even the poorest people, partly for purely commercial reasons, are still encouraged to think of themselves as candidates for participation in the big American payoff. And of course the nature of the payoff has changed—no more white picket fences. The mass media has taught everybody the glamour of crime. When you're a crook, you're on the side of the chaos;

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how can you lose? If you're the guy that walks home from the felt factory after twenty years on the job and gets blown away by a freak on angel dust for the pay in your pockets, you're a chump.

INTERVIEWER

This touches on a condition central to your work—what you've called everybody's "diminishing margin of protection." Thus in *Dog Soldiers* you replay Vietnam in Southern California. And in the other books people are always falling prey to some form of planned or random violence—

STONE

We live in a time of ongoing war and the threat of violence is very close to all of us. It's not an exotic thing. You have to be pretty lucky to get through a year without witnessing it.

INTERVIEWER

If a writer explores violence at length in his work, is there a sense in which he inevitably celebrates it?

STONE

I would call it a coming to terms. There is a catharsis. For me, it's a way of dealing with the violence in myself. I think it can do that for the reader as well. Violence *is* a preoccupation of mine. It occurs in my books perhaps disproportionately. But it's been my fortune to see rather a lot of it and to have to think about it. I try to curb my fears in what I write. There's a sense in which I use my characters as scapegoats to pay my dues for me, to ward with their flesh danger away from mine. You know, when some drama intrudes on your life your first impulse is to recount it—to turn disaster into anecdote or art. I deal with much that's negative and gruesome, but I don't write to dispirit people. I write to give them courage, to make them confront things as they are in a more courageous way.

INTERVIEWER

Let me return to Conrad, with whom you've claimed some

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affinity. I've seen it suggested that Freud and Conrad provide polar notions of reality and thus suggest a continuum along which we may locate ourselves. In Freud there's the faith that psychic reality is knowable once we strip away the skins of neurotic fiction that conceal it. In Conrad, we find reality numinous, and indeed composed of all our fictions about it.

STONE

Well, Freud created a mythology out of a nineteenth-century scientific optimism; he said that the glow in the haunted house was just phosphorescence from the swamp—a comforting high bourgeois myth. Conrad was a man of the world and a skeptic who worked not on the basis of ideology but of common sense. He saw things as they are without wanting to reduce them to theory. In that respect he's closer to the temper of our own time and certainly closer to my own ideas about reality and about how to explore it in fiction.

INTERVIEWER

Conrad provided you with a powerful epigraph for *Dog Soldiers*. And Robert Lowell one for *A Hall of Mirrors*. There's no epigraph for *A Flag For Sunrise*.

STONE

It's in the book. The Emily Dickinson poem Justin quotes. "A wife—at daybreak—shall I be—"

INTERVIEWER

Of course. "Sunrise, hast thou a flag for me?" That throws a lot of the weight of the book on Justin.

STONE

It gives many of her scenes the quality of metaphorical event I mentioned. It links religious themes with erotic encounter. But it also summarizes a larger idea, the question of what awaits us all on the morning after the battle, so to speak. What will be there to claim our allegiance—the red banner of revolution, or some emblem we can't recognize but that we've somehow

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created? And of course I intend an ironic reference to the American flag.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have your own ways, like Hicks, of "endeavoring to lead a spiritual life"? I mean distinct from your work.

STONE

I attempt to. I'm always looking for a spiritual discipline I can live with. When I stopped being religious, being a Catholic, it was—as I did not realize at the time, but have come to since—devastating to me. It was a spiritual and moral devastation—shattering. And yet there was no trauma at the time; it seemed painless, it felt like ordinary maturation. But it left a great hunger.

INTERVIEWER

Is Catholicism still important to you?

STONE

Somebody has said that it's almost as hard to stop being a Catholic as it is to stop being a black. But I greatly admire the Protestant spirit, the Protestant heroes—Luther, Kierkegaard. And I admire the great skeptics—Erasmus and Montaigne, that cast of mind. It's very valuable. And, ironically, it's built into the kind of rigorous training in language and logic that I received.

INTERVIEWER

Catholic reason enabled you to cast off Catholic faith?

STONE

Well, it surely wasn't intended to. But I did learn the lucid analysis of rhetorical argument and thus became more immune to propaganda. And yet the skepticism that led me out of religious belief also leads me out of secular complacency.

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INTERVIEWER

Aside from that childhood training in rhetoric, did you learn anything about writing in other academic programs? Anything useful or valuable about creative writing?

STONE

Not really. But a creative writing class can at least be good for morale. When I teach writing, I do things like take classes to bars and race tracks to listen to dialogue. But that kind of thing has limited usefulness. There's no body of technology to impart. But that doesn't mean classes can't help. The idea that young writers ought to be out slinging hash or covering the fights or whatever is bullshit. There's a point where a class can do a lot of good. You know, you throw the rock and you get the splash.

INTERVIEWER

Your own experience in a way represents a synthesis of available models for American novelists: some academic background and connection, and an active life in a varied world.

STONE

I think writers at present can pass fairly easily between these worlds. I have no academic credentials aside from my work, but I've been able to teach and I sometimes enjoy it.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have any interest in writers's conferences and colonies, that kind of thing?

STONE

I've been several times to a wonderful conference in Alaska that's filled with trappers and fishermen and people who spent a lot of time alone. Every year, on the winter solstice, they get together to talk books and writing and party.

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INTERVIEWER

You've been accorded from the beginning a handsome ration of prizes, awards, literary recognition of that kind. Has that had an effect on your work—given you an image you had to live in terms of?

STONE

I've kept my edge, stayed hungry, I think. I never sold so many copies that I got overfed. It's less things like prizes than the simple fact of your first publication that changes everything forever. The minute you appear in print you lose some freedom and innocence and accept a degree of responsibility.

INTERVIEWER

Are there things you'd like to attempt in fiction that you haven't done yet?

STONE

I'd like to write more comic stuff. I mean, there's always some humor in all the awfulness I write about, but sometimes I think of writing—well, I don't know that I could write a purely humorous book that wouldn't have some sort of ghastliness in it. It would have to be a weird kind of humor.

INTERVIEWER

Are there areas of weakness in your work so far that you can identify, things that dissatisfy you?

STONE

Ken Kesey once told me I use too many commas.

INTERVIEWER

Do you ever have writer's block?

STONE

I have a lot of depressed periods during which I'm incapable of working. But I'm not blocked by material or anything when

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I'm actually writing. I turn up more stuff I want to do than I have room or time to do it in.

INTERVIEWER

That must be in part because you don't stay in your study numbed by an inward gaze, but return repeatedly to the world of experience—to Central America, for example. It's that fact that gives your work its political dimension and lets your readers encounter realized characters in a recognizable world. Incidentally, I'm interested in a remark of yours I encountered somewhere to the effect that Central America is a "due bill coming up for payment."

STONE

No mystery there. That's been a sphere of influence we've exploited economically and dominated politically and militarily very much the way the French, with a bit more success, continue to dominate their former colonies in Africa. We've run that part of the world without a lot of respect for the people who live down there; we've looked down on them as racial inferiors. I have a copy of the *Navy Times* from around 1913 that carries an ad for Shinola shoe polish that says, "Whether you're going on the beach for a party or storming ashore to teach the greasers a lesson, you want to look sharp!" We saw these places as banana republics peopled by gooks who somehow were not quite real people. Nobody thought it compromised American virtue to kick their ass if they got out of line. It was, you know, the white man's burden. And we have to remember that when Kipling passed that duty on to the United States there was no cynicism or irony intended. I don't believe this country has simply been some horror story of racism and murder. But we have incurred a blood debt and it *is* coming up for payment. The end of empire comes for everybody and it's coming for us. So now we're faced with this area close to our southern sea frontier where people have it in for us and are only too eager to collaborate with our enemies. I mean if there was an invasion of the United States and whoever it was wanted to have a Central American legion, they'd get plenty of volunteers.

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INTERVIEWER

You've remarked in your own voice, as has Holliwell in *A Flag For Sunrise*, that we've exported what's worst in our culture, while what's best doesn't export. What is best? What have we got at home that keeps us going?

STONE

Idealism. A tradition of rectitude that genuinely does exist in American society and that sometimes has been translated into government. Enlightenment ideas written into the Constitution. Emerson and Thoreau. The whole tradition so wonderfully mythologized in John Ford's Westerns—the Boston schoolmarm seeking service on the frontier. We've tried to export that in the form of, say, missions to China, but it hasn't really worked because we were more a commercial than a military or cultural empire, so it was our appetites that we exported, along with the relevant parts of our popular culture. The French at least attempted to include their artistic traditions in their *mission civiliatrice*; they and the British, to a lesser extent, did have something to offer their colonials. All we wanted was to do business. The point is that so much that is best in America is a state of mind that you can't export.

INTERVIEWER

But, as you say, we do export shoddy aspects of our culture along with our commerce. Holliwell argues this in his speech in Compostella.

STONE

Low-level pop culture, yes. Because America has managed to create a working class with the leisure and money to command the resources of the society but without the taste to enhance those resources. From that derived the pop culture we've exported. Now that isn't evil but it is a form of pollution. It's why you get Central American Indians with transistor radios glued to their skulls. I don't mean to make a reactionary argument about the purity of the noble savage. But there is such a thing as authenticity. You'll recall that Holliwell's speech at-

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tacks American culture but also America's enemies. He sees, as I see, contradictions that simply have to be faced and that possibly cannot be solved. There's a shared Marxist and American attitude that where there's a problem there must be a solution. What about the problem that doesn't have a solution?

INTERVIEWER

There it is.

STONE

There it is. That aphorism may not be the least significant link between Central America and Vietnam.

INTERVIEWER

You've raised the specter that haunts all of your work—as an aspect of American culture that fuels Rheinhardt's spite in *A Hall of Mirrors*, as the heart of the darkness of *Dog Soldiers*, and as a dreadful nostalgia in *A Flag For Sunrise*. Do you think the war will persist as a background for your work for some time?

STONE

I'm constantly drawn back to it. I had to keep myself from doing that in my new book, *Children of Light*, which is about the personal lives of some fucked-up people, unhappy writers and actors in the movie business. But even here I try to refer those lives to the American condition, my usual subject. And the war, as you say, continues to haunt us.

—William Crawford Woods

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The Ascent of Mount Carmel

Robert Stone

Ten miles to the south, the road on which they drove turned inland, crossed the mountains on the spine of Baja, and ran for thirty miles within sight of the Sea of Cortez. At the final curve of its eastward loop, a dirt track led from the highway toward the shore, ending at a well-appointed fishing resort called Benson's Marina. At Benson's there was a large, comfortable ranchhouse in the Sonoran style, a few fast powerboats rigged for big game fishing and a small air strip. Benson ran a pair of light aircraft for long distance transportation and fish spotting.

In the early hours of the morning, their car turned into Benson's and pulled up beside his dock. Walker had slept; a light cokey sleep, full of theatrical nightmares that had his sons in them.

The woman on the seat beside him was an actress named Lu Anne Bourgeois whom he had not seen for ten years. Nearly that long before, he had written a screenplay for her based on Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. It was being filmed now, near the hotel from which they had come. They were both long married to other, absent people.

That night, at the hotel, there had been a party at which bad things had been said and Walker had been knocked down. They had driven to Benson's pursuing the illusion of escape.

Lu Anne walked straight to the lighted pier and stood next

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to the fuel pumps, looking out across the gulf. Walker climbed from the car and asked the driver to park it out of the way. In the shadow of the boat house, he had some more cocaine. The drug made him feel jittery and cold in the stiff ocean wind. Lu Anne had a bottle of scotch in her tote bag, so he had a drink from it.

After a few minutes, Benson's son Enrique came out looking sleepy and suspicious. He was a Eurasian, the son of a Texas promoter who had realized his dreams and a Mexican-born Chinese woman. When he recognized Lu Anne he smiled.

"You two want to go to Cabo again?" he asked. At the beginning of shooting, Lu Anne's husband had been with her and the two of them had flown to Cabo San Lucas. Benson had mistaken Walker for Lu Anne's husband. As the two men shook hands, Walker watched him realize his mistake.

"No," Lu Anne said. "We want to go to Villa Carmel."

He was looking down at the ground in embarrassment, an unworldly young man.

"I don't know, ma'am. There's a *chubasco* over the mountains. I have to get the weather."

"Of course," Lu Anne said.

The youth stood with them for a minute or so and then went back inside the main house.

"We should go back," Walker said.

She shook her head.

"They can't shoot without you," Walker told her, taking another slug from the bottle. "You should be back at work tomorrow. And I should be gone."

Lu Anne kept looking out to sea.

"I don't think I want to go back to work tomorrow. And I don't want you to go."

"It's senseless," Walker said.

He looked anxiously into her eyes, seeing there what he had feared to see. She had married her psychiatrist in an absurd futile gesture of hope. She worked, although not often; she was a wife and a mother. Still mad, he thought. Otherwise she would not be there beside him. "I don't know why you want to go to Villa Carmel. What's there?"

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She smiled at him quickly, surprised him.

"Wait until you see."

"Weren't we near there once?" Walker asked. "You were shooting somewhere in the Sierra. A long time ago."

"We were miles away. We were shooting a Mexican setting of *Death Harvest* in Benjamin Constant."

"Was it Benjamin Constant?" Walker asked. "Or was it Benjamin Hill?"

"It was way the other side of Monte Carmel. Villa Carmel is on this side. The Pacific side."

"Why do you want to go there?"

"The reason . . ." she began and paused. "The reason is a pretty reason. You'll have to trust me." She took hold of his hand. "Do you?"

"Well," Walker said, "we're out here together in this storm of stuff. What have I got to lose?"

"We'll see," Lu Anne said.

Young Benson came back with his map case and climbed to the small room above the boathouse that was his operations shack. He was sporting the leather jacket and white silk scarf it pleased him to wear aloft. When he turned on the lights, an English language weather report crackled over the transmitter. Walker and Lu Anne on the pier below could not make it out.

She looked through her tote bag and came up with a white bank envelope filled with bills and handed it to Walker.

"What's this?"

"To pay him."

He started to protest. She turned away. "My party," she said.

Climbing the wooden stairs to Benson's office, he put the envelope beside his wallet, still stuffed with his winnings from Santa Anita. Both of them had so much money, he thought. It was so convenient.

"How's the weather?" he asked young Benson when he was in the office.

"*Garay*!" young Benson said, looking wide eyed at him. "Man, what a shiner you got!"

Walker put a hand to his swollen face.

"Is it real?" the young pilot asked. Walker looked at him in blank uncomprehension.

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"I thought it might not be real," the youth explained. "I thought maybe it was fake."

"Ah," Walker said. "It's real. An accident. A misstep."

"Yeah," Benson said, "well let's see. Reckon I can get you all over there. We might have a problem coming back. When you need to be back?"

"I don't know. Can you wait for us?"

"That's expensive," the young man said uncertainly. "If the *chubasco* settles in we might get stuck."

"When can we leave?"

"When it's light," Benson said.

Walker took five hundred-dollar bills out of the envelope.

"Take us over for the day. If we're not back by sunset tomorrow we'll throw in a few hundred more."

"Three hundred for the day, if I wait. Five hundred if I have to wait overnight."

"Good," Walker said. He gave the youth five hundred. "Hold it on deposit."

She was waiting for him at the foot of the steps.

"Will he take us?"

"He'll take us at first light. He says the weather might keep us over there. Is there a hotel in Villa Carmel?"

She did not answer him. He looked at the sky; it was clear and lightening faintly. The moon was down. The autumn constellations showed Venus was in Taurus, the morning star.

He asked her if she knew what it meant because it was the sort of thing she knew. Again she failed to answer him.

After a while she pointed to their driver, who was asleep behind the wheel of his parked limousine.

"Pay him," she said. "Pay him and send him back."

"You're sure?"

"Gordon, I'm going to Monte Carmel. Do you want to be with me or not?"

He went over and woke up the driver and paid him and watched the car's tail lights bounce over the road between Benson's and the highway.

"Why there?" he asked her.

He thought, to his annoyance, that she would ignore his question again.

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"Because there's a shrine there," she said. "And I require its blessedness."

"That'll be lost on me," Walker said.

She looked at him with a knowing, kindly condescension.

There was light above the Gulf of California, gray-white at first, then turning to crimson. It spread with all the breathtaking alacrity of tropical mornings. Walker found its freshening power wearisome. He was a little afraid of it.

Morn be sudden, he thought. Eve be soon.

Benson came out of his office and clattered down the steps to the dock, sweeping his scarf dashingly behind him in the wind.

"Let's go, folks."

"Is it a Christian shrine?" Walker asked. "I mean," he suggested, "they don't sacrifice virgins there?"

"Never virgins," Lu Anne said. "They sacrifice cocksmen there. And ritual whores."

"If you could give me a hand with the aircraft, mister," young Benson said over his shoulder as they fell in behind him, "I would appreciate it a whole lot."

Benson hauled open the hangar's sliding door and moved the wheel blocks aside. Then he and Walker guided the aircraft out of the hangar and into position. By the time they were ready to board the morning was in full possession. The disc of the sun was still below the Gulf but the morning kites were up against layers of blue and the lizard cries of unseen desert birds sounded in the brush until the engine's roar shut them out of hearing.

"She's a real sparkler," Benson said when they were airborne. Walter, who had been sniffing cocaine from his hand, looked at the youth blankly again. Was he referring to Lu Anne, buckled into the seat behind him?

Benson never took his eyes from the cockpit windshield.

"I mean the day is," he explained. "I mean you wouldn't know there was bad weather so close."

"Yes," Walker said. "I mean no. I mean we'll never get enough of it."

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A few minutes out, they could see the peaks of the coast on the eastern shore of the Gulf and the sun rising over them. The whole sea spread out beneath them, glowing in its red rock confines, a desert ocean, a sea for signs and miracles.

He turned to look at Lu Anne and saw her crying happily. The sight encouraged him to a referential joke.

"Was there ever misery loftier than ours?" he shouted over the engine.

She shook her head, denying it.

"Everybody O.K.?" Benson asked.

"Everybody will have to do," Walker told him.

Within the hour they were landed on a basic grass airstrip in the heart of a narrow valley rimmed with verdant mountains. The air was damp and windless. A knot of round-faced, round-shouldered Indian children watched them walk to the corrugated iron hangar that served the field. A herd of goats were nibbling away at the borders of a strip. Through a distant stand of ramon trees, Walker could make out the whitewashed buildings of town—the dome and bell tower of a church, rooftops with bright laundry, a cement structure with art deco curves surmounted with antennas. Villa Carmel.

While Benson did his paperwork, a middle-aged Indian with a seraphic smile approached Walker to inquire whether a taxi was desired. Lu Anne was out in the sun, shielding her eyes, squinting up at the ridge line of the green mountains to the east.

Walker directed the man who had approached him to telephone for a car and within ten minutes it arrived, a well-maintained Volkswagen minibus with three rows of seats crowded into it. He bought a bottle of mineral water at the hangar stand and they climbed aboard.

They drove into the center of Villa Carmel with two other passengers—Benson and an American in a straw sombrero who had been lounging about the hangar and who never glanced at them. In the course of the brief ride, Walker underwent a peculiar experience. He was examining what he took to be his own face in the rear view mirror, when he realized that the roseate, self-indulgent features he had been ruefully studying were not his own but those of the man in the seat in front of

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him. His own, when he brought them into his line of sight, looked like a damaged shoulder of beef. The odd sense of having mistaken his own face remained with him for some time thereafter.

When they pulled into the little ceiba-shaded square of Villa Carmel, Benson and the American got out and the driver looked questioningly toward Lu Anne and Walker.

"Tell him the shrine," Lu Anne said.

Walker tried the words he knew for shrine—*la capilla*, *el templo*. The elderly driver shrugged and smiled. His smile was that of the man at the airport, a part of the local Indian language.

"Monte Carmel," Lu Anne said firmly. "*Queremos ir ahi*."

Without another word, the driver shifted gears and then circled the square, heading back the way they had come.

They drove again past the airstrip and followed the indifferently surfaced road into the mountains. As they gained distance they were able to turn and see that the town of Villa Carmel itself stood on the top of a wooded mesa. The higher their minibus climbed along the escarpment, the deeper the green valleys were that fell away beside the road. They passed a waterfall that descended sheerly from a piñon grove to a sunless pool below. Vultures on outstretched motionless wings glided up from the depths of the barrancas, riding updrafts as the sun warmed the mountain air.

When they were almost at the top of the ridge, the minibus pulled over and halted at the beginning of a dirt track. They could see across the next valley, which was not wild like the one from which they ascended but rich with cultivation. A railroad track ran across its center. There were towns, strung out along a paved highway. Miles beyond another range of mountains rose, to match the range on which they stood.

"We've been here," Walker said to Lu Anne. "Haven't we?" He got out of the bus and walked to a cliffside. "We stayed in that valley, at a hot springs there. You were working in these hills. Or else," he said, nodding across the valley, "in those."

Her attention was fixed on a winding rocky pathway that led up a hillside on their right, toward the very top of the hill. Walker

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saw her question the driver and the driver, smiling as ever, shake his head. He walked back to the bus.

"Is he saying," Lu Anne asked, "that he can't drive up there?"

Walker spoke with the driver and determined that, indeed, the man was cheerfully declining to take them farther.

"He says he can't make it up there," Walker told Lu Anne. "He says the bus wouldn't go up."

Looking the track over, Walker saw that it appeared to be little more than a goat trail, hardly a road at all.

"Pay him," Lu Anne said.

He had nothing smaller than a twenty. Shamefacedly he put it in the driver's hand. The driver responded with no more than his customary smile.

"I want him to come back this evening," Lu Anne said.

When Walker suggested this to the driver, the driver said that it would be dangerous for them to spend the day in the mountains alone. There were bad people from the cities, he said, who came on the highway and did evil things.

"We won't be near the highway," Lu Anne said.

So Walker asked the man to return before sundown and the man smiled and drove away. Walker suspected they would never see him again.

Lu Anne walked across the road to the foot of the path.

"Hey, bo," she said. "Don't you know we're going up?"

Walker knew. He fell into step with her.

"The next hill," he said to her when they had gone a way, "that never was a thing that troubled me."

"No," Lu Anne said.

"I was always hot for the next hill. Next horizon. Whatever there was. That's why I came along now."

He paused, looked around and took a pinch. It was very wasteful. When he had satisfied himself, he took a drink of bottled water. Lu Anne took some cocaine from him.

"Yes," she said. "You're Walker."

"They don't call me Walker for nothing," Walker said. "It's a specialty."

"Of what does it consist?" Lu Anne asked.

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"Well," he said, "there's the road. And there's one."

"And how does one approach the road?"

"One steps off confidently. One in front of the other. Hay foot, straw foot. Briskly."

"Oh," Lu Anne said, "that's you, Gordon. That's your style all right." She linked arms with him. "Tell us more."

"Well," he said, "there are things to know."

"I knew there would be. Tell."

"There's to and fro. There's back and forth. There's up. Likewise down. There's taking care of your feet."

"And the small rain," Lu Anne said.

"And mud. And gravel and sand. And shit. And wet rot and dry rot. And going over fences."

"Can you look back?"

"Never back. You can look down. You have to see where you're going."

"But is there a place for art?" Lu Anne asked with a troubled frown. "It's all so functional."

"There's whistling. That's the principal art. The right tunes in the right places. Whatever gets you through the afternoon."

"How sad," Lu Anne said. They walked on, winding upward along the hillside. "How sublime."

"The road is never sublime," Walker told her. "The road is pedestrian."

When they had walked for half an hour, they could see both valleys—the plains to the east, and the forested barranca through which they had come.

They stopped to drink the rest of their water and take more of the drug. The road over which they had driven ran close to the summit; the top of Monte Carmel was only a quarter mile or so above them.

"Your road is mine, Walker," she told him.

"Right," he said. He glanced at her; she was clutching the collar of the army shirt she had thrown on. Her eyes were bright with pain.

"It was always me for you."

"I knew that," he said. He was thinking that, of course, they would never have lasted three months together by the day. Ar-

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rivals, departures, fond absences and dying falls were all there had ever been to it. Bird songs and word games, highs and high romance. "We weren't free."

"Oh, baby," she said, "there ain't no free."

"Only," Walker said, "the comforts of philosophy."

"Which in your case," Lu Anne said, "is me."

Walker laughed and so did she.

"Likewise the consolations of religion," Lu Anne said, "which is why we are out here . . ."

"Under the great vault of heaven," Walker suggested.

"Under the great vault," she repeated, "of heaven." She stopped and began to cry. She knelt in the dust, her eyes upturned in absurd rapture, doing the virgin's prayer. Walker was appalled. He bent to her.

"Can't you help me?" she asked.

"I would die for you," he said. It was true, he thought, but not really helpful. He was the kind of lover that Edna Pontellier was a mother. At the same moment he realized that his life was in danger and that he might well, as he had earlier suspected, have come to Mexico to die. His heart beat fearfully. His sides ached.

"I don't require dying for," Lu Anne said. He considered that she deceived herself. Weeping, she looked childlike and stricken, but even in his recollection she had never been more beautiful. She had grown so thin in the course of the film that her face had contracted to its essential lines which were strong and noble, lit by her eyes with intelligence and generosity and madness. The philosophy whose comforts she represented was Juggernaut.

He knelt breathless beside her and realized that he was happy. That was why he had come, to be with her in harm's way and be happy.

She looked into his face and touched his hair. "Poor fish," she said. "I was always there for you."

"Well," Walker said, "here I am."

"Too late."

She raised her eyes again.

"And nothing up there, eh? No succor? No bananas?"

He helped her to her feet.

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"Who knows?" Walker said. "Maybe."

"Maybe, eh?"

She stayed where she was; Walker was above her on the trail, which grew steeper as it ascended.

"Do you know why I was an actress?" she asked him.

"Why?"

A sudden luminous smile crossed her face. He could not imagine what force could drive such a smile through tears and regret.

"You'll see," she said and took him by the hand. She climbed with strong sure steps. Just short of the crest, she released his hand and fell to her knees.

"This is the way we go up," she said. He watched her struggle up the last rise, one knee before the other. When he tried to help her, she thrust his hand away.

"This is how the Bretons pray," she told him. "The Bretons pray like anything."

So it was on her knees that she mounted the top of the hill. Walker went on before her, to find a featureless building of the local stone with a thatched roof. Over the door, a wooden sign rattled on the unimpeded wind of the mountaintop, lettered to read *Seguridad Nacional.* There was a noxious smell in the thin air.

He stood panting before the building, and he realized at once when he had seen it last and why the landscape to the east had seemed so familiar. Ten or perhaps twelve years before, he had come down from Guadalajara by limousine to visit her on the set of a Traven remake. The unit had been based on the Constancia Hot Springs in the cultivated valley to the east. He had worked many Mexican locations and sometimes confused them in memory, but he remembered it quite well now, seeing the homely building with its sign. The unit's laborers had thrown it up in a day or two.

Lu Anne crawled over the coarse yellow grass of the hilltop on her knees. A long slow roll of the thunder echoed along the mountain range. An enormous bank of storm clouds was drifting toward them from the coast.

"This is a holy place," Lu Anne said. "Sacred to me."

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"This is the police post from that Traven picture," Walker told her. "It isn't anything or anywhere. It's fake,"

"It's holy ground," she told him. "The earth is bleeding here."

Walker went around behind the building; the ground there was muddy and stinking. He found an empty wooden trough with a litter of corn cobs around it. There was a barred window through which he could see stacked ears of maize and heaped grain sacks.

He went back to where Lu Anne was kneeling.

"For God's sake, Lu Anne! It's a fucking corn crib on a pig farm."

Lu Anne leaned forward in her kneeling posture and pressed her forehead into the dirt.

Walker laughed.

"Oh, wow," he cried. "I mean, remember the ceremony they had? The governor of the state came out? They were going to make it a film museum." He stalked about in manic high spirits. "It was going to be a showplace of cinema, right? For the whole hemisphere, as I recall. Second only to Paris, a rival collection. Oh Christ, that's rich."

Lu Anne raised her head, filled her hands with dry earth and pressed them against her breasts.

"A film museum," Walker shouted. "On top of a hill in the middle of a desert in the middle of a jungle. Funny? Oh my word."

He lay down in the spiky desert grass.

"So everybody went away," Walker crowed, "and they turned it into a pig farm." He rested his head on his arm.

He lay crying with laughter, fighting for breath at the edge of exhaustion, shielding his eyes against his forearm. When the first lightning flash lit up the corners of his vision he had a sense of lost time, as though he might have been unconscious for some seconds or asleep. He raised his head and saw Lu Anne standing naked over him. He scurried backwards, trying to gain his feet. A great thunderclap echoed in all the hollows of their hill.

"What have you done to me, Walker?"

There was such rage in her eyes, he could not meet them.

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He looked down and saw that her feet were covered in blood. Streaks of it laced her calves, knees to ankles. When he looked up she showed him that her palms were gouged and there was a streak of blood across her left side.

"I was your sister Eve," she said. "It was my birthday. Look at my hands."

She held them palms out, fingers splayed. The blood ran down her wrists and onto the yellow grass. When he backed away, rising to one knee, he saw a little clutter of blood-stained flint shards beside the pile of her clothes.

He turned to her about to speak and saw the lightning flash behind her. The earth shook under him like a scaffold. He saw her raised up, as though she hung suspended between the trembling earth and the storm. Her hair was wild, her body sheathed in light. Her eyes blazed amethyst.

"Forgive me," Walker said.

She stretched forth her bloody hand on an arm that was serpentine and unnatural. She smeared his face with blood.

"I was your sister Eve," Lu Anne said. "I was your actress. I lived and breathed you. I enacted and I took forms. Whatever was thought right, however I was counseled. In my secret life I was your secret lover."

Propped on one knee, Walker reached out his own hand to touch her but she was too far away. The lightning flashed again, lighting the black sky beneath which Lu Anne stood suspended.

"I never failed you. Other people begged me, Walker, and they got no mercy out of me. My men got no mercy. My children got none. Only you. Do you see my secret eyes?

"Yes," Walker said.

"Whose are they like?"

"I don't know," he said.

"Only truth here. It's a holy place."

"It's not a place," Walker said. "You're bleeding and you're going to be cold." He stood up and took off his windbreaker to cover her but she remained beyond his reach. "It's nowhere."

"Gordon, Gordon," she said, "your road is mine. I own the ground you stand on. This is the place I want you."

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"There's nothing here," he said. He looked around him at the stone, the bare hilltop. "It never was a place."

"Panic, Gordon? Ask me if I know about panic. I'm the one that breathed in the boneyard. I've had the Long Friends since I was sweet sixteen." The Long Friends were creatures of her delusion. He had never quite determined what they looked like. He thought of them as old women, smelling of mildew and sachet.

"I can't choose the music I hear, whether it's good music or bad. I'm your actress, Gordon, this is mine. I know every rock and thorn and stump of this old mountain. I may be with you somewhere else and all the time we're really here. Did you think of that?"

"No," Walker said.

"Don't be afraid, Gordon. Look at me. Whose eyes?"

He only stared at her, holding his windbreaker.

"Gordon," she said, "you cannot be so blind."

"Mine," he said.

"They are your eyes," she told him. "I'm your actress, that's right. I'm wires and mirrors. See me dangle and flash all shiny and hung up there? At the end of your road? Mister what-did-you-say-your-name-is Walker? See that, huh?"

"Yes, I see."

"Yes? Hey, that's love, man."

"So it is," Walker said.

She cupped a hand beside her ear. "You say it is?"

"I said it was, yes."

"Well you goddam right it is, honey."

Walker was compelled to admit that it was and it would never do either of them the slightest bit of good.

"Why me I wonder?"

"Why?" She looked at him thoughtfully. "Oh la." She shrugged. "One day many years ago I think you said something wonderful and you looked wonderful saying it. I mean, I should think it would have been something like that, don't you?"

"But you don't happen to remember what?"

"Oh, you know me, Gordon. I don't listen to the words

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awfully well. I'm always checking delivery and watching the gestures. Anyway," she said, marking a line with her finger between his eyes and hers, "it's the eyes. Down home they say you shoot a deer you see your lover in his eyes. A bear the same, they say. It's a little like that, eh? Hunting and recognition. A light in the eyes and you're caught. So I was. So I remain."

"If a hart do lack a hind," Walker said, "let him seek out Rosalind."

She smiled distantly. The lightning flashed again, farther away. "What good times we have on our mountain," she said. "Poetry and music." She closed her eyes and passed her bloody hands before her face, going into character. "If the cat will after kind, so be sure will Rosalind."

Walker took a deep breath.

"But it never worked out."

"Things don't work out, Gordon. They just be."

Walker stared at his friend. "You're all lights," he said. He was seeing her all lights, sparkles, pinwheels.

"Oh yes," she said cheerfully. "Didn't you see? Didn't you?" She shook her head in wonder. "How funny you are."

"I never did," he said.

"This is the mountain where you see the things you never saw. There are eighty-two thousand colors here, Gordon. I've been your mirror. Now I'll be more. And you'll be my mirror."

"More and a mirror," Walker said. "How about that?"

"Gordon, Gordon," she said delightedly, "your two favorite things. More and mirrors."

"It's a kind of cocaine image, isn't it?"

"No, my love, my life. It's the end of the road. It's through the looking glass. Because there's only one love, my love. It's all the same one."

"I'm not going to make it," he told her. "I can't keep it together."

With her lissome arms and her long painterly fingers she wove him a design, resting elbow on forearm, the fingers spread in an arcane gesture.

"All is forgiven, Gordon. Mustn't be afraid. I'm your momma. I'm your bride. There's only one love."

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"I've heard the theory advanced," Walker said.

"Have you? It's all true, baby. Only one love and we'll fall in it."

"O.K.," Walker said.

"O.K.!" she cried. "Aw-right!" She stepped toward him; he still saw her against the sky and the storm. "So you might as well come with me, don't you think?"

"On that theory," Walker admitted, "I might as well."

Her limitless arms embraced him. He went to her. She pursed her lips, briskly business, and took the wad of cocaine and the Quaalude box from his pocket.

"Put your toys away," she said. She flung them over her shoulder into the dry brush. "We don't take out our toys when we fall in love. We'll be our toys when we fall in love. We'll be our own little horses."

He looked over her shoulder to where she had tossed the drug.

She frowned at him and pulled at his collar.

"And we take our clothes off. We don't require clothes."

Walker took off his windbreaker. As she was unbuttoning his shirt it began to rain. He shivered. He watched her unbuckle his trousers, smearing blood across them.

"I know there's a reason," he said, "that we don't require clothes but I can't remember what it is."

She looked up at him with the same sly wink she had flashed heavenward on the climb.

"Gordon," she sighed, "don't be such an old school teacher."

He watched her blood seep into his clothes as she undressed him. He could not believe how much of it there was.

"Rain," he said to her.

"We'll pray," she answered. "And then we'll sleep."

He looked up into the storm and saw the black sky whirling.

"No!" he shouted. "No you don't."

His pants fell down about his ankles as he started to run. He kicked them off, bent to pick them up and ran off dragging them behind him. Lu Anne stayed where she was watching him sadly. He ran to where she had left her own clothes and scooped them up. The clothes and the sharp stones around them were covered with blood.

The door of the building looked massive but half of it came

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off in his hand when he pulled at the latch. Behind it, about four feet inside the building, the owners of the grain had built a serious door, secured with a rusty padlock. Walker huddled in the sheltered space between the broken false door and the true one.

Outside, Lu Anne stood in the hard tropical rain and shook her hair. The rain washed the blood from her wounds and cleaned the grass around her.

"Lu Anne," he called. "Come inside."

She stopped whirling her hair in the rain and looked at him laughing, like a child.

"You come out."

He picked up his windbreaker and went after her. He was wearing his shoes and socks and a pair of blood-stained jockey shorts.

"Come on, Lu," he said. "Chrissakes."

He advanced on her holding the bloody jacket like a matador advancing on a bull. When he came near, she picked up a stone and held it menacingly over her shoulder.

"You better stay away from me, Walker."

"You are so fucking crazy," Walker told Lu Anne. "I mean you *are*, man. You're batshit."

She threw the stone not overhand but sidearm and very forcefully. It passed close to his bruised right cheekbone, a very near miss.

"Fuck you," he said. He turned his back on her but at once thought better of it. He began to back toward the shelter with the windbreaker still out before his face, the better to intercept stones. When he was back in his shelter he discovered the whiskey in Lu Anne's tote bag.

"Hot ziggity," he whispered to himself. He took two long swallows and displayed the bottle to Lu Anne.

"Lookit this, Lu Anne," he shouted. "You gonna come in here and have a drink or stay out there and bleed holy Catholic blood."

He watched her pick her way daintily over the sharp stones toward his shelter.

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"I'll have just a little bit," she said. "A short one."

Walker was wary of attack.

"You won't hit me with a rock, will you?"

"Don't be silly," she said.

"You almost took the side of my head off just now."

"It was a reflex, Gordon. You presented an alarming spectacle."

"Panic in the face of death," Walker admitted. "Obliteration phobia."

"You were washed in the blood," Lu Anne told him. "You'll never get *there* again." She reached for the bottle he was cradling. "I thought I was offered a drink earlier."

Walker watched her help herself to several belts.

"What was going to happen?" he asked her.

"I guess we were going to die. What's wrong with that?"

"Living is better than dying. Morally. Don't you think?"

"I think we had permission. We may never have it again."

Walker took the bottle from her and drank.

"We'll begin from here," Walker said. "We'll mark time from this mountain."

"Who will, Gordon? You and me?"

"Absolutely," Walker burbled happily. "Baptism! Renewal! Rebirth!"

Lu Anne pointed through the rain toward the road they had climbed. "It'll all be down from here, Gordon."

"Christ," Walker said, "you threw my coke away. I had at least six grams left."

"Takes the edge off baptism, renewal and rebirth, doesn't it? When you're out of coke?"

"We should have some now," Walker said petulantly. "Now we have something to celebrate."

"Screw you," Lu Anne said. "Live! Breathe in, breathe out. Tick tock! Hickory Dickory. You get off on this shit, brother, it's yours. And you may have my piece."

Walker took up some of their blood stained clothing and placed it over Lu Anne's wounds to staunch the bleeding. The rain increased, sounding like a small stampede in the thatch overhead.

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"What about your kids?" Walker said.

Lu Anne was looking at the rain. She bit her lip and rubbed her eyes.

"Goddam you, Gordon! What about your kids?"

"I asked you first," Walker said. "And I told you about mine."

"Mine, they've never seen me crazy. They never would. They'd remember me as something very ornate and mysterious. They'd always love me. I'd be fallen in love, the way we nearly were just now."

Walker yawned. "Asleep in the deep."

He arranged his windbreaker and his duck trousers to cover them as thoroughly as possible.

"Yeah," Lu Anne said and sighed. "Yeah, yeah."

They settled back against the mud and straw.

"Things are crawling on us," Walker said sleepily.

"Coke bugs," Lu Anne told him.

For some time they slept, stirring by turns, talking in their dreams. When Walker awakened, he was covered in sweat and bone weary. He kicked the false door aside. The sky was clear. He sat up and saw the yellow grass and the wildflowers of the hilltop glistening with lacy coronets of moisture. On his knees, he crept past Lu Anne and went outside. The *chubasco* had passed over them. The wall of low gray-black clouds was withdrawing over the valley to the east, shadowing its broad fields. An adjoining hill stood half in the light and half in the storm's gloom. Its rocky peak was arched with a bright rainbow.

Walker examined his nakedness. His arms, torso and legs were streaked with Lu Anne's blood; his shorts dyed roseate with it.

"Sweet Christ," he said. There was no water anywhere.

When he heard her whimper he went inside and helped her stand. She was half covered with bloody rags and her hair matted with blood but her stigmatic wounds were superficial for all their oozing forth. She had been making her hands bleed as much as possible, the way a child might.

She came outside, shielding her eyes with her forearm.

"How's your Spanish?" Walker asked her.

"I can't speak Spanish. I thought you could. Anyway what's it matter?"

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"Sooner or later we're going to have to explain ourselves and it's going to be really difficult."

"Difficult in any language," Lu Anne said. "Almost impossible."

"How do you think I'd make out thumbing?"

"Well," she said, "you don't seem to be injured but you're covered with blood. Only people with a lot of tolerance for conflict would pick you up. Of course I'd pick you up."

"We'd better have a drink," Walker said.

"Oh my land," Lu Anne said, when Walker had given her some whiskey, "look at the rainbow!"

"Why did you have to throw my cocaine away," Walker demanded. "Now I can't function."

"It's right back there somewhere," she said, indicating the brush around the stone house. "You can probably find it."

"It's water soluble," Walker told her. "Christ."

"I have never been at such close quarters with a rainbow," Lu Anne said. "What a marvel!"

"You know what I bet?" Walker said. "I bet it's a sign from God." He went to the shelter where they had lain and sorted through their clothes. There was not a garment unsoiled with Lu Anne's blood. "God's telling us we're really fucked up."

Lu Anne watched the rainbow fade and wept.

"What now?" Walker demanded. "More signs and wonders?" He held up his bloody trousers for examination. "I might as well put them on," he said. "They must be better than nothing."

"Gordon," Lu Anne said.

Walker paused in the act of putting on his trousers and straightened up. "Yes, my love?"

She came over and put her arms around him and leaned her face against his shoulder.

"I know it must all mean something, Gordon, because it hurts so much."

Walker smoothed her matted hair.

"That's not true," he told her. "It's illogical."

"Gordon, I think there's a mercy. I think there must be."

"Well," Walker said, "maybe you're right." He let her go and began pulling on his trousers. "Who knows?"

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"Don't humor me," Lu Anne insisted. "Do you believe or not?"

"I suppose if you don't like my answer I'll get hit with a rock."

She balanced on tiptoe, jigging impatiently. "Please say, Gordon."

Walker buckled his belt.

"Mercy? In a pig's asshole."

"Oh, dear," Lu Anne said. She walked away from him toward a rock against which he had left the whiskey and helped herself to a drink. When she had finished the drink, she froze with the bottle upraised, staring into the distance.

"Did you mention a pig's asshole?" she asked him. "Because I think I see one at this very moment. In fact I see several."

Walker went and stood beside her. On a lower slope, great evil tusked half-wild pigs were clustered under a live oak, rooting for oak-balls. A barrel size hog looked up at them briefly, then returned to its foraging.

"Isn't that strange, Gordon? I mean you had just mentioned a pig's asshole and at that very moment I happened to look in that direction and there were all those old razorbacks. Isn't that remarkable?"

Walker had been following her with her faded bloodstained army shirt. "It's a miracle," he said. He hung the shirt around her shoulders and took hold of one of her arms. "The Gadarene swine."

Dull-eyed, she began walking down the hill. Walker started after her. She tripped and got to her feet again. He followed faster, waving the shirt.

"Lu Anne," he shouted, "those animals are dangerous."

She stopped and let him come abreast of her. When he moved to cover her with her shirt, she turned on him fists clenched.

"Who do you think it was," she screamed, "that breathed in the graveyard? Who was bound in the tomb?"

Walker stayed where he was, watching her, ready to jump.

"You don't think that filthy tomb person with the shit for eyes, you don't think he saw who I was? Answer me," she screamed. "Answer me! Answer me Walker goddam it!"

Walker only stared at her.

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She threw her head back and howled, waving her fists in the air.

"For God's sake, Lu Anne."

"Talk to me about Gadarene swine? Who do you think it was bound in fetters and chains? Where do you think I came by these?" She pointed around her, at things invisible to him. "Don't you torment me! Torment me not, Walker!"

"C'mon," he said. "I was joking."

Her lip rolled back in a snarl. He looked away. She turned her back on him and went to a place beside the house where the mud was deep and there was a pile of seed husks, head high.

"Jesus," she cried, "Son of the Most High God. I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not."

"Amen," Walker said.

She clasped her hands and looked at the last wisps of rainbow. "I adjure thee, Son of the Most High God. I adjure thee. Torment me not." She buried her face and hands in the pile of chaff. After a moment, she got up and went up to Walker. She seemed restored in some measure and he was not afraid of her.

"You're a child of God, Walker," she said. "Same as me."

"Of course," Walker said.

"That's right," Lu Anne said. "Isn't it right?"

"Yes," Walker said. "Right."

"But you can't take the unclean spirit out of a woman, can you, brother?"

She touched his lips with her fingertips, then brought her hand down, put it on his shoulder and looked at the sky. "Ah, Christ," she said, "it's dreadful. It's dreadful we have spirits and can't keep them clean."

"Well," Walker said. "You're right there."

"No one can take it out. Man, I have watched and I have prayed. And I've had help, Walker."

"Yes," Walker said. "I know."

"If you don't believe me," Lu Anne said, "just ask me my name."

"What's your name, Lu Anne?"

"My name is Legion," she said. "For we are many."

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For a minute or so she let him hold her.

"Is it all right now?" he asked.

"It's not all right," she said. "But the worst is over."

He was delighted with the reasonableness of her answer. He went to get himself a drink. When he returned Lu Anne was lying in the stack of seed husks.

"Well," he said, "that looks comfortable."

"Oh, yes," she said, "very comfortable."

He lay down beside her in the warm sun and buried his arms in the seeds.

"Downright primal."

"Primal is right," Lu Anne said. She laughed at him and shook her head. "You don't know what this pile is do you? Do you? Because you're a city boy."

She sat in the pile, sweeping aside the seed husks with a rowing motion until the manure it covered was exposed and she sat naked in a mix of mud and droppings, swarming with tiny pale creatures that fled the light.

"There it is," she told Walker. "The pigshit at the end of the rainbow. Didn't you always know it was there?"

"You'll get an infection," Walker said. He was astonished at what Lu Anne had revealed to him. "You're cut."

"Out here waiting to be claimed, Gordon. Ain't it mystical? How about a drink, man?"

When he bent to offer her the bottle she pulled him down into the pile beside her.

"I had a feeling you'd do that," he said. "I thought . . ."

"Stop explaining," Lu Anne told him. "Just shut up and groove on your pigshit. You earned it."

"I guess it must work something like an orgone box," Walker suggested.

"Walker," Lu Anne said, "when will it cease, the incessant din of your goddam speculation? Will only death suffice to shut your cottonpicking mouth?"

"Sorry," Walker said.

"Merciful heavens! Show the man a pile of shit and he'll tell you how it works." She made a wad of mud and pig manure

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and threw it in his face. "There, baby. There's your orgone. Have an orgone-ism."

She watched Walker attempt to brush the manure from his eyes.

"Wasn't that therapeutic?" she asked. "Now you get the blessing." She reached out and rubbed the stuff on his forehead in the form of a cross. "In the name of pigshit and pigshit and pigshit. Amen. Let us reflect in this holy season on the transience of being and all the stuff we done wrong. Let's have Brother Walker here give us only a tiny sampling of the countless words at his command to tell us how we're doing."

"Not well."

"Yeah, we are," Lu Anne told him. "We're going with the flow. This is where the flow goes."

"I wondered," Walker said.

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Cynthia Zarin

Colophon

Rain of the months and years we had
known each other pressed in, printing
the new car as we left the wedding.
Larkspur, phlox, roses weedy in the
gravel, the stretch of slanted windows,
the meander of spring into summer
in the beanfield. The relief of going
hit in a peculiar way, abreast,
a spreading stain: the rain sloshed
on the windshield. As we went, the church
rose into the brink, and we counted out
the white dresses and the school ties,
the vows. The hillside spiraled,
chestnut, and along the service road
Lady Bird's florals glistened, so that
even now, speaking in the rain,
we think of her—her little hats,
triangular in the heartland.
Our glance lit on fenceposts, water
towers, the road frayed like a hymnal
ribbon as we followed it, winding
past the resort towns: Shelburne, Barrington,
Tanglewood, the misty profile of Brahms
in the treetops, under the striped tents.
Ahead of us, the rain came in ridges,

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whole meadows of water, and the air
was matted: three centuries of water
since the bells pealed out. My shoes
were wet in the dew, waiting
for the ceremony, and now, looking
over towards you, I saw your face
cloudy against the dripping window.

Early in the morning, we stood on the lawn
and watched the boys playing kickball
against the scarred wall of the parsonage.
"Which one was you,"
I asked, "before the deluge?"

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Donald Revell

The Gaza of Winter

The frail smoke and virtues of the season blind
us, almost with hands, and which of us can instruct
the other now? I will have to find your body
shifting at the edge of your last word.
You will have to find whatever I could mean
by groping along that same edge. And all of winter
will be ground to nothing in a slow mill

of smoke and virtue. We are bound to that mill
and our cold seeking and shifting is the blind
set task of that bondage, cruellest in winter.
What does it matter that we love and instruct
our hearts rightly? I have lost the way to your body.
You have lost the way to know what I mean
when I curl up inside of every word

you speak as if it were your hand. A word
is as close as I can ever come. This winter,
we have been forced to understand the blind
distance between virtue and a body
bound up in nothing it could ever mean.
A marriage is Gaza. Ours is blind at a mill
now, every turn of which seems meant to instruct

the dark in darkening, hearts in how to instruct
themselves in spite. There will be blanks instead of words
from now on, a grist of silence for the mill.
But why is it I still think of going blind
with you as my life's work? In our first winter,
I followed you up the steps to where your body
slipped out of grey ice and lit the mean

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rooms wonderfully. What would happen if those mean
rooms turned up again, a few steps from the mill
we turn? Would anything about them instruct
us in how to live there as we did, all winter,
curled up in the smoke and virtue of blind
first nights and first days? I wish that every word
I knew were a step back to them. A body

should give off more than light if anybody
is to go on thinking of it not meaning
to go crazy. I should do more with the words
I know than make puzzles. A life's work can instruct
a life or can lead it in bondage to a mill
of bad marriages, bad silence, and a blind
refusal to accept that in one winter

everything can go right, then wrong. The winter
I followed you up your steps is over. Your body
is wrapped up in its own words now and cannot mean
what I wish it did. I think of years of mill
work ahead, grinding down a store of words
you will not hear me say, living to instruct
a puzzled heart in how to live blind.

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Cynthia Nadelman

Cold Water and a Boy

Flinging sticks and calling
to an amphibian black dog,
he clings, buoylike, though probably
he could touch bottom,
to the now overturned and
clumsy board.
On it sleek and arching bodies
generally traverse the water in a skid.
They stand in the sun and harden
together, taking turns.

The tide is in now,
it's early, and the mist
turns to air in this quiet
cove on Cape Ann: he's almost
alone, his indefinite body
with some breast development,
most evident in the cold,
not resisting, going along, fitting.

No biceps you can see, bone definition, whiskers
—aboriginal, almost—
these may never come, and
he may not be the better for it.
Think the opposite, though.

Here in the morning ocean
he floats,
and it becomes him.

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Robert B. Shaw

Toll Call

"Is it raining there?"
your voice on the phone
wondered for no reason
right at the end.
It was, where you were.
I looked out. It wasn't.
But after I hung up
the dumb receiver
(why couldn't we both
have stayed off the hook?)
in a minute or two
I saw a few sprinkles,
confirming the proverb,
you might say, about
the just and the unjust.
But only just.

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Dick Davis

Ibn Battuta

Near the beginning of his first journey
The great traveller (who was to suffer
Shipwreck, the loss of all his wealth, his slaves
—On whom he doted—and his son; who was
To fight with pirates, brigands, be received
By princes as an equal and be laughed at
As a pauper; who was to see the known world
And its wonders . . .) near the beginning
Of his first journey he recounts how
In company with a caravan of travelers
He approached a city, and how a crowd
Of well-wishers and relatives came out
To welcome them, so that each man was greeted
By a face he knew, except for him,
Ibn Battuta, whom no one greeted
Because he was a stranger there, and how
This knowledge was borne in on him, and how
He wept.
When the book is closed, this picture
Of the young man in his twenties weeping
—And not the princes, slaves and shipwrecks—
Is what stays with you, so that you almost feel
Across the centuries the pressure of
Your hand against his arm and hear
Your own voice raised in greeting.

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Vittorio Sereni

The Elm's Disease

As if it's important that summer remain
here on the river's bank, the tree sheds
its fainter leaves: mauve
petals of rare flowers
—and the motionless evergreens remain
for posterity.

But more importantly, the people walk cheerfully
the city moves toward the river and a gull
that ventured here sheds feathers
like bolts of lightning.

Guide me, wandering star, as long as you are able . . .

—and daylight melts the banks in honey and gold
then remelts them in an oily dark
until lights swarm.

A humming atom
springs from that creeping feeling, strikes me
right
where it stings and sears the most.

Come here, speak to me, tenderness,
—I say turning to a life
that until yesterday was so near
and today seems so distant—drive
this annoying thorn

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of memory from me:
it's never content.

It's over—that shadow
whispers answering
in the last light—sleep now, lie down.

You have

taken the thorn, not
its pain—I sigh, giving myself to her
in the dream I am already plunging into.

translated from the Italian
by Ann Snodgrass

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Portfolio

Heads

George Condo

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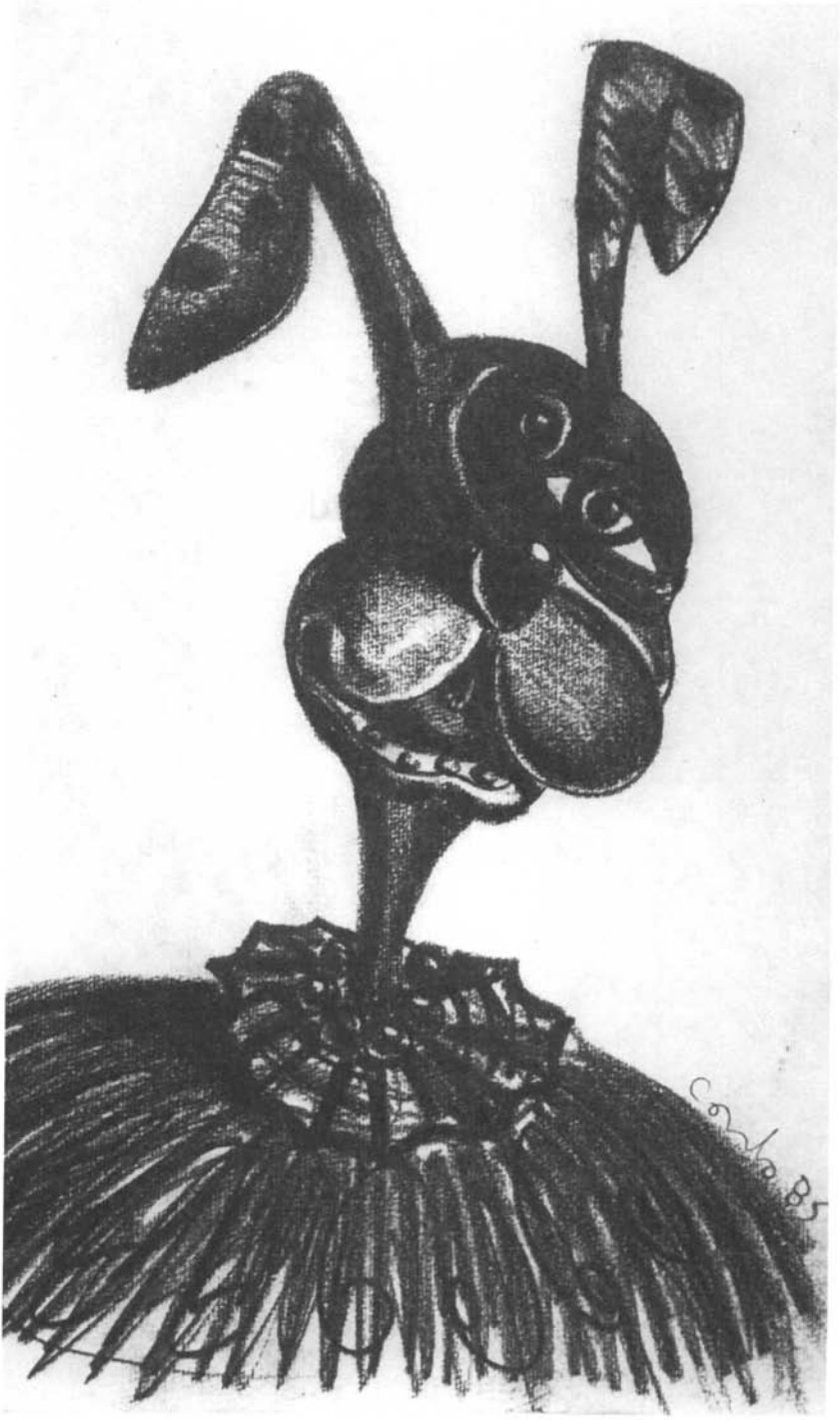

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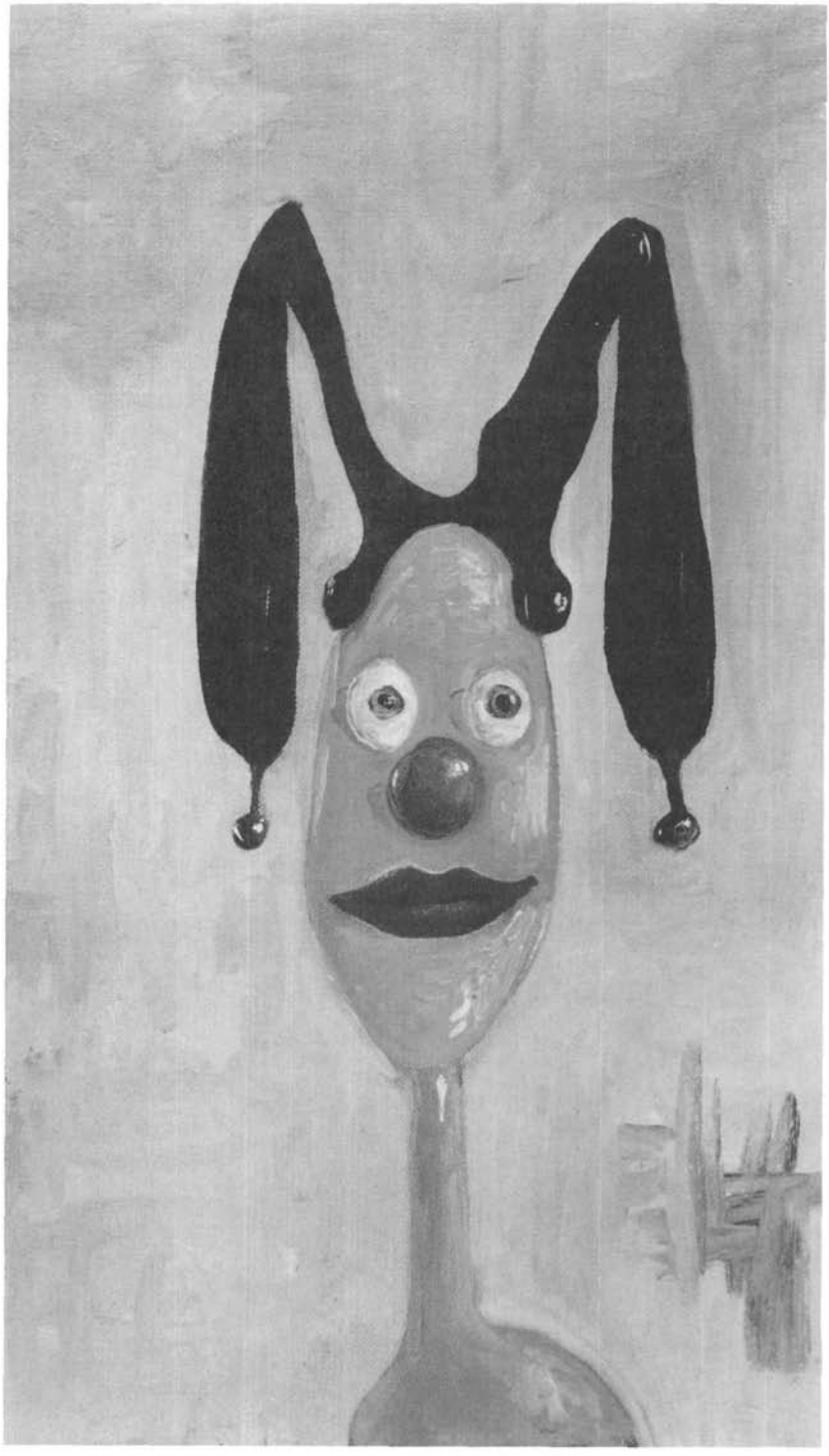

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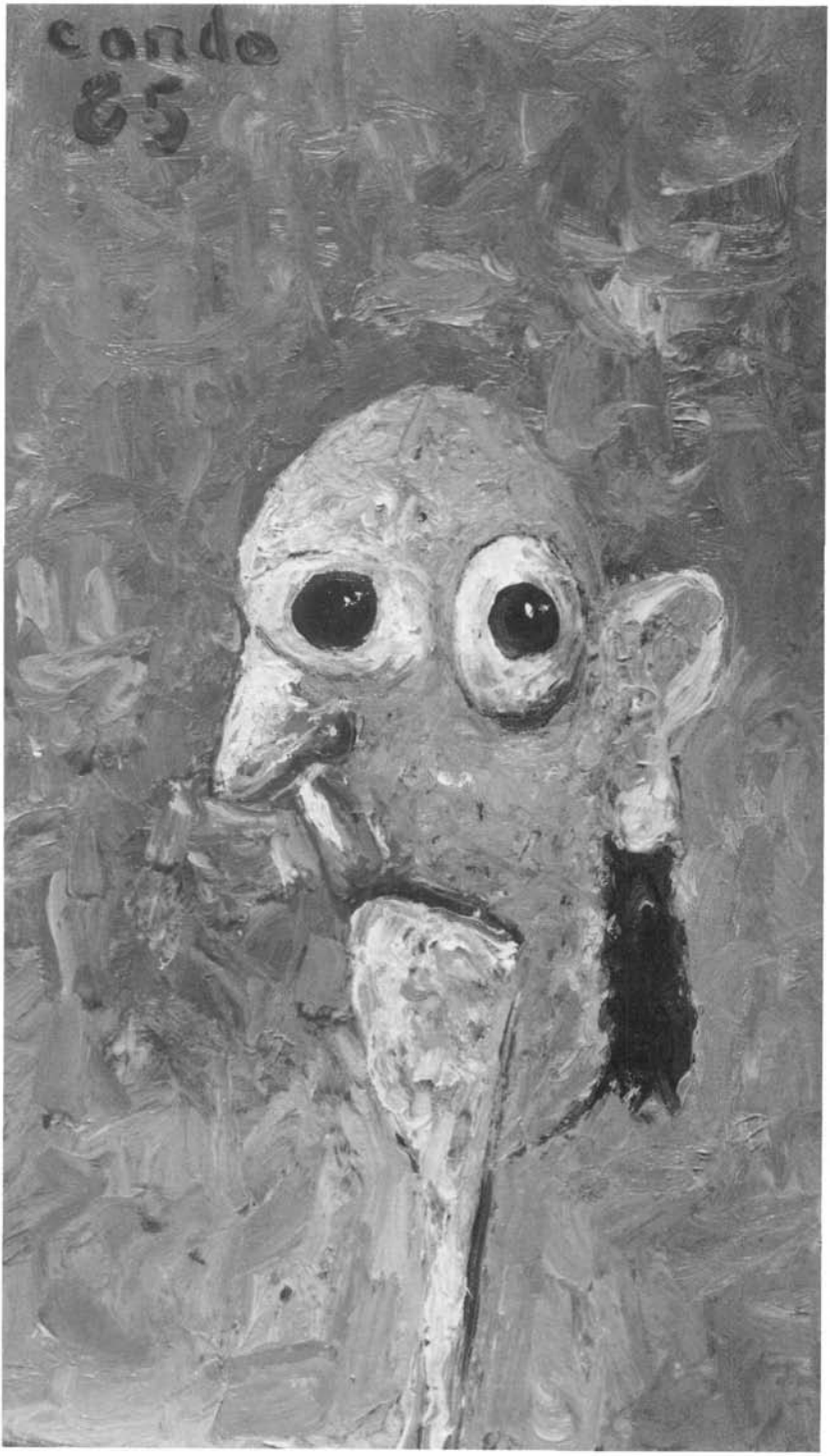

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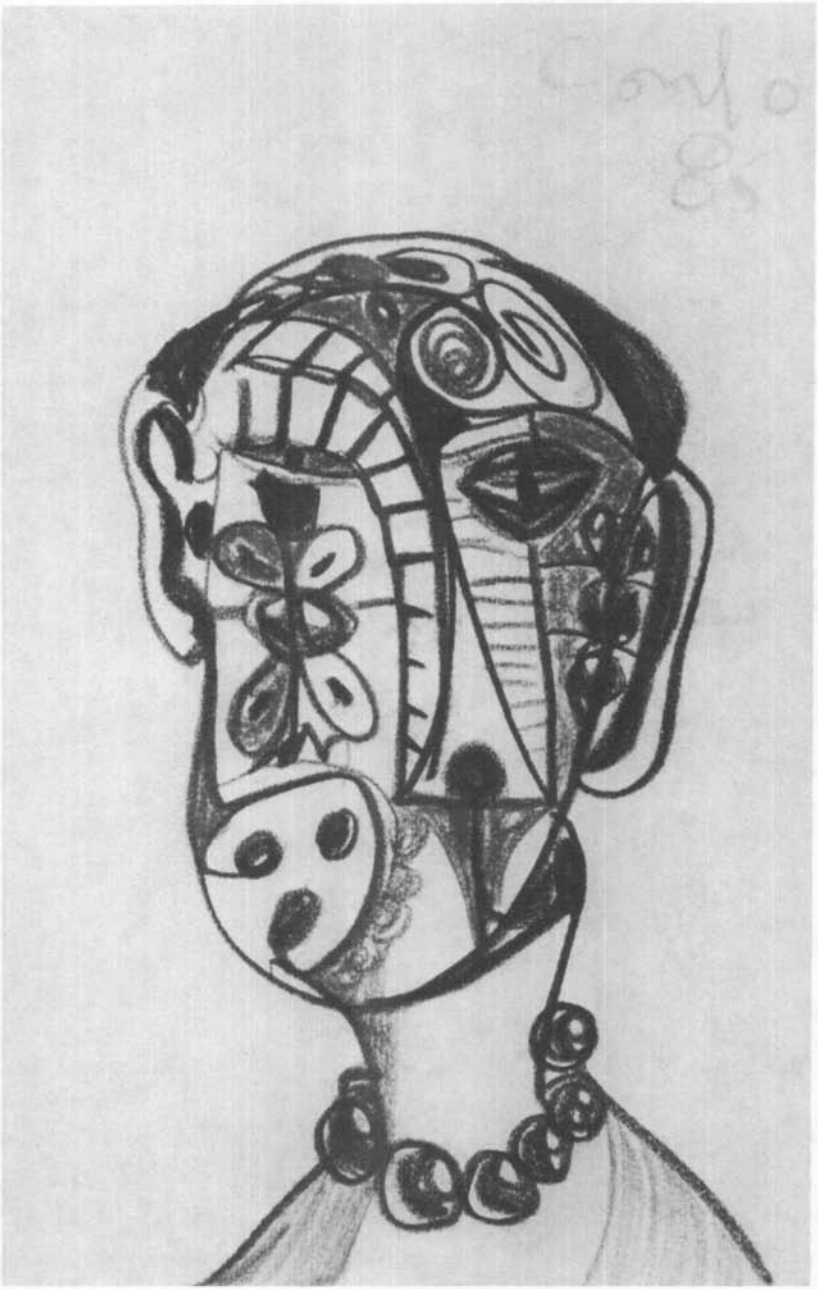

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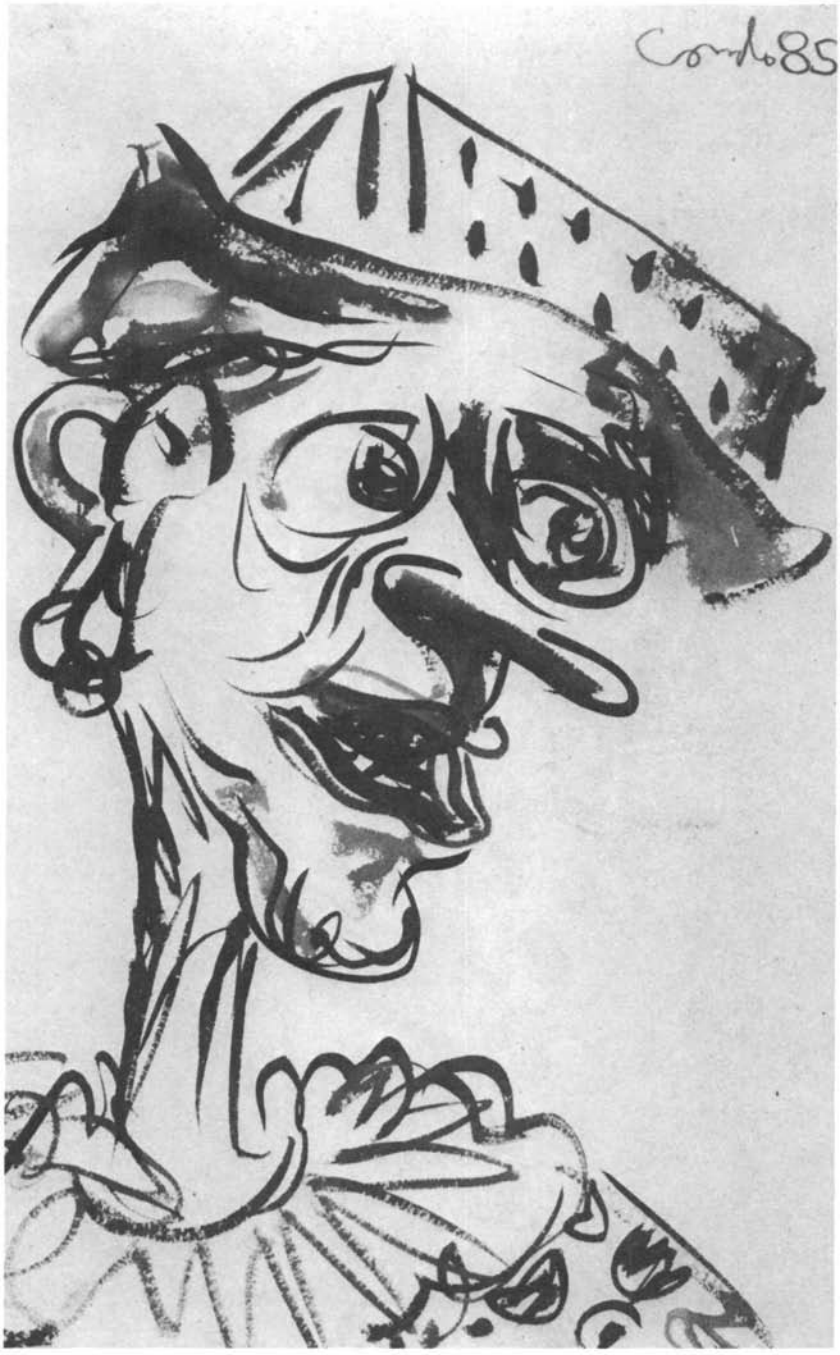

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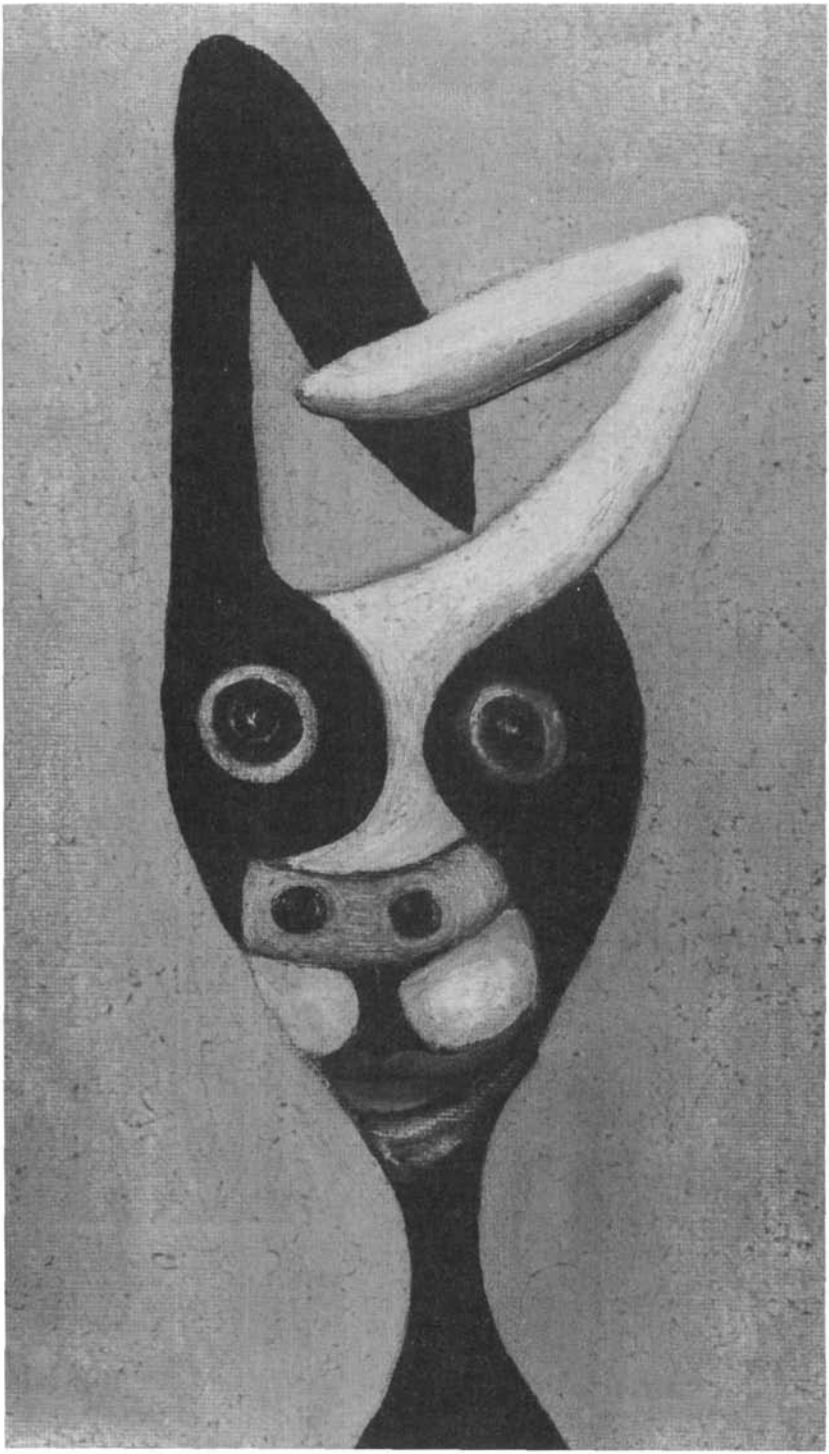

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Five Poems by Ann Lauterbach

Graffiti

Callow and *amorphous*, not gods
but adjectives flung at the sun
whose hot fibers protest their distance
lovingly, touching our skulls lovingly.
This is not a desert.
This is a place where a pedestrian stops,
thinking the face in the window is an owl's.
The face in the window is a Renaissance Youth
eternally snivelling under a green umbrella.
Across the street, it is written *drunk doom*
in large bold, short-circuiting the *stifled*
drowsy, *unimpassioned grief* scrawled in London.
Much of London I don't recall, although names
sail back to me on small craft, like plunder.
Loss of names is a kind of leakage
but there is another: the actual scale
breezing along in daring episodes,
most of it escaping utterance, falling
back into the temple housing *callow* and *amorphous*
as well as *enchanted*, and waits for something
to spirit it toward us, away from the unrecovered.

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Naming the House

The ample, plain snow inhibits detail but frees splendor
briefly, completely, like a dream
ornamented with a consoling retrieval: balsam
gathered at the top of the stairs at the Chappaqua house.
And I think of how we might walk out onto the pond
unknowingly, cross the slight curb
onto ice, trusting similitude's throw of white.
And I think also of how women, toward evening,
watch as the buoyant dim slowly depletes
territory, and frees the illuminated house
so we begin to move about, reaching for pot-holders
and lids, while all the while noting
that the metaphor of the house is ours to keep
and the dark exterior only another room
waiting for its literature.
She dallies now in plots
but feels a longing for dispersal,
for things all to succumb to the night's snow
omitting and omitting. She has this attention:
to the reticent world enforced by the sensual
and her curiosity, a form of anticipation,
knowing the failure of things to null
and knowing, too, the joy of naming it this, and this is
mine.

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Still

The sleeping urgencies are perhaps ruined now
in the soul's haphazard sanctuary,
ignored like a dormant household
shingled in the landscape, a backwoods dump
where the last care has worn through its last
memory. We might think of this as a blessing
as we thrash in the nocturnal waste:
rubble of doors, fat layers of fiber
drooping under eaves, weeds
leaning in lassitudes after heavy rain
surges from the whitened sky.
Thunder blooms unevenly in unknowable places,
breaking distances into startling new chambers
we cannot enter; potentially, a revelation.

Deep midnight, a song of the Chinese zither.
This must be long after the storm, long
after the revolution. It seems some things
were kept in storage after all: cool air
quietly throbbing, a few candles, chance songs
"soul to soul" on the radio. Chance is variant
of change, the weather chancy, changing
but destined. Our trust is that we, too, are
forms attached to content, content to meanings
aroused. It is our custom to bring things about.

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Betty Observed

A tinted, unnecessary warmth coils
loosely around us, adding to the noiseless shambles
we had no time to predict, so that recovery
as in "speedy," as in autumn's cool sweep,
appears at its most fictive, the way
our heroine is, spending most of her day
in front of the mirror. Please identify with her.
She is lovely, Victorian, her auburn hair, upswept,
held by tortoise-shell pins and silver combs;
moonstones hang, drop by drop, from her ears
and throat. The rest of her has the voluptuous,
lacy, pale look of dried hydrangea. Her hands,
innocent, but craving; clearly, she is skilled,
at needlepoint and paint. By now we should be spell-
bound,
impatient, wishing she would do or say something.
When I was young, I used to check the pages for talk;
dialogue was the main key to readability.
That was before I had a taste for abstraction.
"I love you, Betty" was a good sign, and big words
pointing wildly at no time and place
like toy compasses agitating with uncertainties
were few, and far between. "I love you too, Edward."

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Uneasy Requital for Coleman Dowell

1.

A place to go. This is desirable, not an old woman
folded in a chair, hurting at bone level,
stroking a cat, but the answer to where?
unconditionally. By staying where we are
we are punished by our themes:
in sorrow's debt, employees of pain.
Even love is contagious, resurgent, but you said
always to admit Eros when he pounds on the door
with his sack of seed, as if nothing were dormant,
nothing quite finished. The intimate
and the new consort, unrestrained,
until we cannot do otherwise,
our rooms littered, our mouths
formed for the captive, adored, not yet born.
It is small and distant,
a feather's horizon. The unanswered
lifts up and sails back into the familiar
which is insistently private: I dream
and your voice enters my voice
but although it is you, it is now only dream.
You take me to another landscape.
You take me to where land is at sea level
and the sea, rivered around it, shines
under an abundant, low sky.
A deluge of urgencies pounds on a tent.
Driving through the rain I see it,
a pink orb spinning down at the end of a rainbow
where the cows are, drenched, still,
and you drive toward it, eager to show
what is stored under its bright skin: words, words.

2.

We walked along the quay along the unfamiliar lake.
The fair was rained out and there was a girl

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with a wide mouth in a bright red, wide-brimmed hat.
The shore was the antithesis of shadow
but now as I sit by the pool
in the slow September wind, you are
in another landscape and I try to find it.
It was August, weighted with final green.
It was hot, intolerably hot,
and the change came from under the rainbow's hoop
like a blister. I was standing on the bridge.
You stood on the bridge looking back at the city
which looked like a postcard of itself.
Church and clock. Something moved
the statues; something altered the water.
From the cocoon of sleep you speak
and the night keels with your decision in me:
my lame embrace, my prone inventiveness,
your great immaculate face, like Bacon's Blake,
composed. Here, briefly, we are not yet literature,
not yet mourning celebrants. I thought it was a bird
at first, but it was night that entered,
flayed, loose, pushed by the sea's insidious pulse,
its radius a noose, the air in bondage.
From where I stood on the bridge
I could see the moon, flapping on water, unable to escape.

3.

Tell me where you wanted to go.
I am sitting in thick weed
watching a spider wrap prey in white bunting.
Hers is the only silence; you knew that.
The immensity, if that is what it is, shrinks:
where once it embodied morning's reach,
appraised by the wind's flaking light,
it now is sequelled: evening's varnish
stripped off the high ridge, singular, brief.
The trees will be weightless with dry gold.
The public is trooping through

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with bright tents and guns,
staring at the past,
climbing the stairs to your room, is
leaning across the velvet cord,
sniffing the blooms in your great vase.
Without you, this is aftermath and traffic;
the earth thuds back at us with the sound of things
falling. We must empty the pool; pull a tarmac over it.

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Veterans

M. F. Beal

For more than three hours the mountains had loomed ahead yet they did not seem particularly closer to Louise. They grew somewhat larger through the windshield of her truck as it crested small rises in the otherwise flat-as-your-hand prairie, and the lowering yellow sun cast different shadows as it moved westward. The demarcations of color—ranging from the intense greened-up grasses of the hollows through the russet and gold of bench grass and into jagged snow at the timberline far in the distance—still shone lividly under the canopy of sky.

Ross was saying: "It's about twenty miles up this road to the camp where my boy is staying." It was the third time he mentioned his purpose in taking this longer route; Billy, his wife and their two little girls were living in a trailer park near Ruff, a town Louise remembered vaguely from a trip she and her husband made years ago: a post office, café, grocery store and gas station centered between saloons like bookends on a shelf in the dusty plains. "It's changed," Ross said. "Billy told me there's more than five thousand living there now, working the pit or waiting for somebody to die or quit so they can."

The sun dropped to the rim of the mountains, creating an

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iridescent glaze over the summit before melting slowly into it. The sky was the brightest thing now. She listened to the rebuilt engine she'd had put in the old Dodge truck. The odometer indicated it had just over five hundred miles on it now. The reason she volunteered her truck for the trip—which was to take Ross to the doctor—was that his car's lights weren't working. "How's the knee?"

Ross grunted. "Hell, it's okay. Them pills cut out the throbbing."

"Let me know when you want me to drive."

He laughed: "I guess I will be in bad shape when I can't drive." He pressed on the accelerator a little as if in emphasis. The engine revved louder, the truck picked up speed and tires whined on the narrow road. Ross drove mostly in the middle, but there was hardly any traffic.

The next little rise revealed a town in the distance. They both noticed the smudge of smoke in the sky, a gray-purple umbrella over a pool of tiny glittery lights, Ross pointing. "We'll just stop by, see how they're doing, then catch us some supper. We'll be in Casper by nine o'clock, Lou." She settled back in her seat. It was accidental, this trip. Ross had been working on a neighbor's caterpillar tractor and the gear slipped, lowering the blade onto his knee. Nothing broken, but after a few days the bruise turned into a puffy swollen redness which began to throb. Ross could go to a V.A. hospital for treatment; the neighbor was uninsured. Ross had done some work for her, too, not long after her husband died, and one day he brought her a dozen dark red roses. Some nights he stayed over in the bunkhouse instead of driving his old gas-guzzler to his sister's, in return for helping her with some of the heavier chores. He wasn't at all like her husband, a transplant who sunk his Eastern dollars into a quarter section and too many cows to make it through the droughts. Ross had grown up hereabouts, owned and lost more land than she and her husband had ever dreamed of owning; he had the cowboy courtesy and also the same rough edge—about those bureaucrat bastards, lying politicians and fatcats and anybody who didn't work as hard as he did. She and her husband had

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worked hard—harder than they ever considered, in light of the fact they'd viewed the ranch as a form of early retirement—and the work killed her husband at fifty-two. So she was a widow not yet fifty, with grown children in other states. This year after the yearling sale she had a little over forty-five hundred dollars to live on until the next sale.

She knew she was luckier than some. When Ross showed up with the bad knee, she said she'd go with him to the hospital.

Across the tracks next to the railroad trestle sat the trailer park. The part of Ruff which Louise remembered had turned into a dilapidated spur off the main road leading northward where a distantly visible boundary of cyclone fencing enclosed clumps of machinery. Only the giant cranes loomed, their brontosaurus necks poised against the slag mountains they were creating as they excavated the overburdened soil in search of the coalseam.

The road to the trailer camp was unsurfaced and rutted from fall rain. Burdocks, amaranth and thistles in frost-blackened bouquets stood between train tracks and the road. Where the trestle spanned the wide dry river-bed there were cottonwoods and willows. Several small fires flickered in the brushy bottom. Louise thought of bonfires and picnics, but no one would be doing that here. Wind blowing off the mountains promised a freeze by dark.

In the trailer park, vehicles sat racked like offerings in a used car lot. Some were lit already, dim yellow gleams through small windows. Many of the trailers overlooked the wide flat lands toward the pit; floodlights switched on there as she watched, and the shift changed. The road was deeply rutted. The truck rattled over the bumps. Ross turned on their headlamps. "My boy's place is in that second row over there. I stopped by and saw 'em a month ago. Brought the grandkids some little toys."

Louise felt slightly guilty because she had not thought to get anything for Ross's grandchildren; but then why should she? She had barely enough money for herself. Her own children were still in school, married or had a job; there were no grand-

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children yet. She wasn't sure she wanted any, although her neighbor Nelly just laughed at that, and said she'd like it fine when they came.

She realized she didn't want to visit Billy, his wife and their babies. She would stay in the truck. She shivered inside her wool town jacket. Ross turned into the second set of ruts in the hardpan, a narrow drive between small travel trailers, campers, and now and then, tents. A group of ragged-looking children chasing each other with sticks scattered from the truck headlights. A bent skinny woman glanced briefly from the propane cookstove she was working over; their truck was none she recognized. A man sat on the steps of his camper, drinking something in a brown bag. "There it is," Ross said. "Looks like somebody's home." They parked by a tiny travel trailer. Louise could see two heads through the parted curtains in the window.

"You go in," she said. The man sitting on the camper steps lifted a hand in a slow wave like he recognized her, or Ross, who now carefully, as if his leg was fashioned of blown glass, lifted it over the jamb of the truck door. "Can you make it?"

He gave her a look. "Oh yeah. Take another pill in a minute." He hobbled to the trailer door. The sight stabbed her. She hated to feel so sorry for him, and wished she hadn't agreed to take him to the hospital. Then he would have made his—pilgrimage—with somebody else sitting in the front seat and she would be at home with the heater turned up, doing ranch accounts. The trailer door opened; a short stocky fellow who didn't at all resemble Ross smiled politely, let him inside. The door closed.

She folded her arms across her breasts to stay warm. She had been living in the West long enough to know that sometimes a man would drive four hundred miles to tell someone he'd be back in a month and stay a week, then get back in the car and drive away, the rendezvous set up. Conversely, one might arrive or have others arrive and simply settle in for a day or two as if one's host had nothing else to do. What was consistent was the lack of formality—or seeming lack—which had so astounded her when she first moved here and even now struck her as random, impatient, sometimes streaked with sadistic de-

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light at some particularly embarrassing encounter. "Hell with you if you ain't got a sense of humor," she heard Ross say to his sister once on the phone. "Piss on him and the horse he rode in on."

She saw the trailer door open, and Ross moved toward her side of the pickup keeping his leg stiff. She unrolled the window. He bent his face to look at her. "Been some trouble, honey. You better come on in."

There were two young men inside the tiny trailer. Billy was hardly out of his teens, his chin fuzzed with unshaved whiskers the same gingery blond color as his father's. The other was the stocky fellow who had opened the trailer door. He was introduced to her as Ben, the brother of Billy's wife. Ross talked. "I wondered what was going on when I didn't see the car. She took the kids and the car and went back to momma, eh?" Billy nodded, choking a little. His eyes were red and swollen. Ben offered Louise a beer and she accepted, sitting on the bench by the fold-up table. The trailer couldn't be more than fourteen feet long and seven wide, with miniature kitchen and wide bunk visible beyond. The beer made her shiver again. Four people—two of them small children—in this space. Winter coming on. Ben sat opposite. "She took them to mom's," he said. "Mom left a message at the camp office. They're all right." The trailer was very clean and neat, except for a litter of beer cans and ashtrays filled with crushed cigarettes and here and there, withered ends that looked like marijuana roaches. There was a small spider plant hanging near the sink, and a wandering Jew twined around the window curtainrod behind Ben.

Ross and Billy stood in the passage between the sink and the clothes closet. Billy began to cry and his father took him in his arms. "Oh, Daddy," he sobbed. "Oh, Daddy, she's gone." Ross stroked Billy's cheek. They seemed unaware of the presence of Louise and Ben. Ben looked at her briefly, then lowered his eyes. She wished again that she had let Ross go off on his own; but then realized she was simply embarrassed even though the others seemed not to be.

Ross and his son stood in embrace—Ross soothing with

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strokes, Billy continuing to sob, his shoulders working convulsively. Ben sighed, sipped his beer, and offered to light Louise's cigarette. "Toria's always been kind of highstrung," he said to her. "She gets nervous real easy." Ross cleared his throat. "She'll be back, Billy."

Billy sobbed harder. "She won't. She said she never wanted to see me again."

Ross pulled away from their embrace. He seemed to realize suddenly that others were there with the two of them. He spoke in a soft voice. "Son, did you hit Torie?"

Billy was silent. Ross continued. "She's your wife, boy, not your punching bag." He cleared his throat again, and coughed slightly.

Billy shook his head. "I didn't hit her, Daddy."

"What did you do, Bill? Did you hit one of the kids?" Ross held his son at arm's length. Billy shook his head violently. "I called her a bitch."

Father and son made a sound so similar it took Louise a moment to decide what it was—a little more than a chuckle and less than a laugh. Ben smiled, but for the first time looked uncomfortable. He seemed a correct young man; Louise thought he probably agreed but thought it bad form to join with any sound indicating it. She took a swallow of beer and realized how hungry she was. The admission seemed to have set something free in Billy; he was describing the fight. "She's always talking about how hard it is for her, taking care of the children out here, me working short shifts or not at all, the dust so she can't keep the place clean, everything. I asked her, 'Do you think it's easy for me?' I said, 'That's the way it is.' "

When they were back in the pickup on the way out of the trailer park, Ross let his anger loose in long hard fragments of memory. They passed the campfires under the willows, with silhouettes moving in the flame's dance.

"That's your problem," Ross began. "Right down there in the drywash. They come in here willing to work for dirt, and ten of 'em ain't a pimple on a good man's ass. But the union don't

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know the difference, signs 'em all up and pretty soon you see what you get."

Louise huddled into her jacket. The truck heated slowly and she was miserable with hunger after the beer she had drunk while Billy and Ross arranged their next rendezvous. They would not be able to get to Casper by nine, as Ross had promised. Since the death of her husband she had developed the habit of going to bed early, reading, falling into sleep and rising at dawn. So she was out of her routine, irritable with the interruption. She listened to Ross as he began to chronicle his difficulties getting the Veteran's Administration to do something about the concussion injury he got serving in Korea which had led to one problem after another: like this leg, hit by the tractor blade during one of his dizzy spells. Whereas the Vietnam vets complained about a sore finger and got disability payments. She sullenly refused to answer. Ross had taken pills before he left Billy's—how many she did not know—so he was running also on the edge of the drug. She felt trapped in her own vehicle, kidnapped by an angry man.

"That Toria—she's a double-dyed bitch, excuse my French. I know you don't like that word, but that's what she is. Last time I came by, I had a couple little things for the grandkids and she wouldn't let them have them—claimed I was spoiling them. My own grandchildren, eh? She's got a lot of growing up to do."

Louise huddled in her corner. It was getting warmer, and she felt the beginnings of a headache. She felt sorry for the wife, Toria.

She wanted to ask, "What kind of little things did you get your grandchildren?" She understood that he was provoking her, and that if she questioned him too closely his temper would flare. *This is terrible*, she thought. *I start out liking him and suddenly I hate him.* She was giddy for a moment.

They were coming up on Interstate 25. "Ross, let's stop for supper."

He looked sideways at her. "Sure, sweetheart. You hungry?"

"Yes. Aren't you? It's after seven."

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"These pills—they make me kind of lose my appetite. But without 'em my leg throbs so bad I can't hardly stand it."

"I'll drive anytime." She was in fact eager to drive. She felt as if she could regain composure that way.

"That's okay. These pills are working real good right now. Sure, I'll pull over up ahead when we get to a town."

She was finishing her second cigarette when they crested a rise and the town blossomed before them. Ross knew his way around here, too, pulling off the arterial to a sidestreet Basque restaurant. The lot was crowded with pickups a great deal like hers; some were even older. She relaxed. Things would look brighter after they had eaten.

Long trestle tables covered with oilcloth stretched across the center of the dining room, warm and noisy as a combine party. There appeared to be several families of at least a dozen, and one or two of almost 20 members. The men were big, with hands into which beer glasses disappeared. Older women, soft in cotton dresses, and younger ones in tight denim pants, sat together, doing their separate business while the men talked acres per animal and weather. They sat her and Ross at the end of one of these groups, across from each other. Their neighbors were just finishing. "Better have some of the ribeye," the man sitting at Ross's side said. He leaned back, smiled, and put a toothpick in one corner of his mouth. His belly was beginning to fall over the top of his pants. He had gold fillings and a wedding ring. On Louise's side a woman—his wife—smiled at Louise and sipped her coffee. She wore rose colored polyester pants and a white blouse under a pink orlon cardigan. Her hair was beauty shop done in tight grey curls. *She must be older than me*, Louise thought. While Ross answered the husband, the wife asked her "Where you folks hail from?"

As she replied, Louise caught echoes of the other side of the dialogue: Where are you going? Are you making do? Are you holding on, do you believe in God? Why are we here?

The waitress came; the couple and their party left.

She had been adult, mother with child, when she arrived in this territory called the West twenty-five years before. The size of the country; the blank, utterly blue sky, the whole land-

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scape so flat and air so clear natives had a joke with pilgrims: "How far do you think it is to the mountains over yonder?"; and then the savaged land, gullying where the grasses had been scalped, with tiny lifeblood settlements. Gas station. Cafe. Saloon, general store, motel.

One of her first friends when she settled in the ranchhouse was a man who worked with animals, who came recommended to brand and castrate their bull calves. He and his wife put up in the bunkhouse. He worked the corral, the chutes, and when time came to get the last of the critters in, he dogied with what he called his "yellow mutt." His wife did handicrafts-by-mail kits, one a month. When they were there she cut, sanded, glued and decorated a plant holder. She came over in the afternoons to help with supper. The man—Joe—came by and they drank whiskey one evening. Not understanding how, she found herself in a discussion of what love was. Her husband went to bed at midnight. She was drunk, but not as drunk as he was, or Joe, who held himself on his elbows as if her sideboard were a bar and all he had was the rest of his life to figure out the definition of love. She looked at his skull for the first time: it was big and round, broad at the brow. She realized how intelligent he was. His dark hair—scant at the top over straight and definite eyebrows and a hawk nose—was baby fine. She realized she loved him. He said: "You realize my wife and me, we're Indians? Crow language has so many words for love I don't even know all. What do you mean by love?"

She believed then in talk and tried to speak across their twenty years difference in age. It took a while and she felt humbled into another culture in a small way she could ponder. When he left he told her that he loved her and that he would never touch her.

Louise became aware again that she was sitting in the restaurant opposite Ross. He was eating slowly and carefully chewing, as if his teeth hurt. She looked through the robe of flesh at his bones. His head was long, jaw wide. His nose appeared to have been broken. Years in the weather had furrowed and wrinkled his skin to the shape of the skeleton beneath. His tall frame bent to the business of eating as if he was a young child and

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not in his mid-fifties. He had held her a couple of times; she knew how strong he was. She sipped wine, thinking about the night ahead. They would have to get a motel room. It was years since she had stayed at a motel. She hadn't imagined she would be doing so with anyone but her husband. They had gone camping a lot with the children; birdhunting in the fall, temperatures in the seventies during the day and down to zero at night, eating pheasant cooked over a campfire. In the winter, skiing; in the spring, trout-angling in snowmelt streams. In the summer, county fairs, rodeos. When their father died, the children seemed to decide the family was done. If they did visit it was briefly and with ill grace; her youngest said "I hate this place" of the ranch. The fact of his death seemed to have blighted all memories, and though Louise often would have liked to speak a bit about him, even the most innocent reference pulled so much pain forth she was afraid to try. Her husband had been a normal man—driving himself and all of them to the edge and sometimes over in the struggle to ranch successfully. They had a normal marriage: they quarrelled, he struck her, hit their oldest, mellowed as he aged, died younger than they expected in the midst of calving season.

As they ate, the dining room emptied. There were only a few like them still eating and it became quiet except for the clash and bang of dishes from the kitchen as waitresses bussed the remains of the meal and set the room up for breakfast. Louise felt tired and lonely. "Don't take it to heart," Nelly had told her. "It will work out." She noticed Ross was smiling at her: "You done, sweetheart? We better get back on the road 'fore it gets too dark to find it."

The moon set as they pulled onto the Interstate. She offered to drive and Ross refused again to let her. She did not protest: the food and lateness of the evening made it hard for her to keep her eyes open. She calculated they would be in Casper around eleven P.M. There was very little traffic. An occasional long-haul trucker appeared in their headlights, looming as Ross overtook and passed. She worried about the rebuilt engine when

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he went over seventy; after a while he stopped passing and she dozed. When she woke Ross was speaking; they were in a city.

". . . down to one-quarter. We can put a nickel's worth in the tank and make Cheyenne in a couple of hours."

She came suddenly awake. The lights dazzled and she had to blink. "What? Where are we?"

"Casper, honey. Have you been napping? We need to get gas. Five dollars worth will see us in Cheyenne in a couple hours."

Her temples pounded. "But I thought you had an appointment to see the doctor tomorrow at eleven here in Casper."

He turned his head and smiled. He looked tired with the lights and shadows on his face, grey-jawed. "Well that's right sweetheart, but I suspect all he'll do is look at it and send me to Cheyenne. I know a Doc there, connected with the Base. He's seen me before, knows what my problem is with the dizziness. He'll fix me up."

She sat straight. He pulled into a gas station. Every bit of her longed to get between covers and sleep. She felt very angry and wondered why she had agreed to drive with him to the hospital. This maniac insistence on travelling over half the map of the state with a badly swollen leg, on a drug he was taking at four times the prescribed dosage, frightened and frustrated her. She did not believe the doctor in Casper would necessarily send him on; the hospital here was a good one; he had come in for treatment while he could still get around. It was common sense to find a motel, sleep and go to the arranged appointment rested and ready for treatment.

She went to the ladies' room and washed her face. Well, what could she do about it? Should she remonstrate or submit to this new plan? Was it possible to argue with a man about whether he visited his boy, or drove an extra hundred and eighty miles because he knew the doctor? She realized he was sicker than she had thought.

Outside, the cold bit through her wool town jacket. If she had expected this kind of traveling she would have worn a heavier jacket. It was noon when they started, sunny and warm, and the trip from the ranch to Casper, while not a frequent one,

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never took more than three or four hours each way. Now it was almost midnight and the temperature was in the twenties, judging from the way her face felt. Coming around the corner of the building she saw Ross, limping back to the truck. She was terribly afraid. She felt she must drive now, possess the keys and pull into a motel for the rest of the night. Everything would be clearer in the morning. "Ross!" she called.

He stopped and turned, waiting for her. She came up to him. "Now it really is my turn to drive."

He grinned. "Lou, I'm not going to wreck us. I'll drive."

Her scalp heated. "Of course not, Ross. But you look very tired."

He continued to grin. "Aw—I'll do all right for a while yet. Thing is, I'm about to run out of them pills."

"Ross, I think we should stop here for the night and go in for your appointment."

He still grinned. "Git in the truck, woman. I'm going to drive a little longer, but I'll find us a motel. Look for that bottle of pills, will you? I think I stuck it in the glovebox."

There was more traffic between Casper and Cheyenne, which in itself comforted Louise a little. After she found the vial of pills, counted four left and gave him only two in spite of argument, she slowly became aware that he knew this town better than she did, and was driving them past the outskirts of Casper even as she said with each motel—"there's a nice looking place—" "Oh, I know a better one—just down the road a little bit." He drove. The town stopped and they were in darkness again. Another town, motel lights turned off for the night. More darkness, and another town. She was past caring. At one point they seemed to be having an argument: she was telling him again she would drive, and he replied that he didn't believe in letting a lady do all the hard work. She challenged him: How much hard work had she done that day, anyhow? And he replied she had been up and got him breakfast and gone with him to see the boy—that was her work. Yes, she said, but where did he get the idea she couldn't help with the rest? To which he said his daddy gave him that idea.

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In the town of Wheatlands he pulled over at a motel with the sign off. "George lives not far from here. I know these folks."

It was almost two in the morning. The false light which reflects off high mountains even in greatest darkness turned the facade of the buildings grey as stone. The office light came on, a pool of yellow. A short bald man transacted the key. Ross returned stiff-legged: "This is a nice place. We're overlooking the pool." He drove around back and moved her case and his before she had a chance to notice. He opened the door; the room was enormous: a foyer with a telephone stand and beyond, a king-size bed, curtained windows, tall lamps on fancy bedside tables. He switched on the lights and T.V. and opened the curtains. The pool was empty this time of year. "Make yourself at home."

He moved restlessly, pulling down bedcovers, checking the bathroom and carrying his case in, pulling his razor and beginning to shave as she opened her case. She had brought a gown and bathrobe and change of blouse and underwear. She felt too tired to shower. As he did, she undressed. The shabbiness of her nightgown surprised her. She tried to remember when she had gotten it—perhaps ten or twelve years before. It had a satin yoke and fell straight from her breasts in heavy plum colored folds. She sat down on the enormous bed and looked at the image on the T.V. set—an old movie. Joel MacCrea, Randolph Scott, Mariette Hartley, Colorado high country, aspens in fall gold, yes she could remember even the name of the movie: *Ride the High Country.*

Ross returned. "Say, that's a nice shower, honey. Lots of hot water." He sat to use the phone.

She showered. He was in bed when she returned, watching the movie. He said, "I never saw this one before."

As she crawled into bed beside him, warm from the shower, she thought how comfortable it felt. This was the first time between them yet it had a familiar feeling. He was nude, muscular under fair, almost reddish skin traced with veins. He had a tattoo on his left breast, a heart with garlands. The place for the name had been entirely inked in. When she settled he put his hands on either side of her waist as if he was afraid she would

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get away, then ran one upwards towards her breasts. He moved his palm over her nipples. He laughed as he probed.

Towards dawn he cried out, waking her. She did not remember where she was; the shadowed room seemed completely strange. Ross groaned, moved, and yelled again. "Oh God," he said. "Oh Jesus. Where are the fucking pills?" He seized her upper arm and held it painfully tight. She tried to think if she was the one who had put them somewhere. "The bathroom. I'll get them."

But he was on his feet, limping grotesquely towards the door, banging the bed, dresser, knocking one of the fancy lamps over to crash on the floor and grunting with each step. She heard him thud against the door jamb and finally the sound of the bottle being uncapped. The water ran. He was quiet for a moment; then he resumed the deep grunts she realized were the sounds of pain.

She had been rubbing her arm where he bruised it. The sounds he was making frightened her. She kept hoping they would stop, that he would calm down, lie down, let the drug work. He did not; he came limping back into the bedroom. "I can't stand this. I got to get to Cheyenne."

She sat up and switched on the bedlamp. The windows were black rectangles of moonless night. The room was cavelike, monofunctional, a place to sleep. She was very tired. "The pills will start to work in a few minutes," she said.

He turned a masklike face towards her, lips pulled tight, knit-browed, eyes furious with energy: "I had fourteen goddamned pills when we took off yesterday. I just took the last two of them." He limped to the telephone, dragging it roughly from the table so the receiver fell. He groaned as he bent to retrieve it, held the set in one hand and dialed with the other. "Get me a cigarette, will you, babe?" He sank onto the foot of the bed. She heard the ringing faintly as she leaned for his pack and lit one. He took it and puffed as the line answered.

"George? Ross. Buddy, I'm hurtin'. Dropped a blade on my leg a couple of days ago. Made it to Wheatlands before I had to stop, and I can't drive, the way this damn thing is pounding."

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There was a pause. "I'm out of the goofballs, too." George replied; she couldn't hear the words. Then Ross. "Bullshit, I'm here at the motel in town." He gave the name. "Get your lazy ass out of bed and get it over here." George said more. Ross puffed cigarette smoke. "Listen, Buddy, if you ain't over here in fifteen minutes I'm going to cut this thing off with my pocketknife. You got that?" He repeated the name of the motel and jammed the receiver back on the phone. It fell to the floor with a jangle of bells. He lowered himself more carefully onto his back, threw his arm over his eyes and groaned again. "That dirty bastard, giving me a hard time after all I done for him."

She set her feet on the floor. "I'll drive you to Cheyenne." The leg was so swollen it stuck out stiffly. With his trousers off she could see how bad it was. The entire area was red, but over the knee the flesh was yellow; it looked puffy, the wrinkles stretched to white lines. He moved his arm restlessly. "Naw," he said. "You don't want to drive to Cheyenne. I knew when we left you wasn't going to make it all the way." He pulled up onto one elbow. "George'll be here. He knows better." He sat, stood and began to hobble towards the bathroom. It was clear he would be able to dress faster than she could. She heard the rustling of fabric and the thump of his beltbuckle, the clatter of change dropping. He cursed, grunted.

She continued to sit on the edge of the bed. The waxed floor had a greasy feeling and her feet were getting cold. Her head rang with self-reproaches—could she have been more generous, fallen in with the night drive toward his Cheyenne doctor friend at the Air Force Base? But why hadn't he told her that was where he wanted to go in the first place, instead of leading a chase over half the state, visiting his son? Why had she become involved at all? He had a sister and brother-in-law within fifty miles of her place.

There were washing sounds from the bathroom, and she heard Ross cough and spit over the noise of running water. She stood and put on her robe. She had not remembered to bring slippers. Fourteen pills he had taken in as many hours. She felt annoyed by her bare feet. What was she expected to do? Pack as if she was taking off for an unexplained destination for the rest of

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her life every time she climbed into a vehicle with him? No questions, let the driver know when she got hungry, fall asleep in the corner of the cab when she got tired?

What stifled the reproaches and the flash of anger was understanding that she had a place of her own. This knowledge, like the resonance of a musical instrument, warmed her. She could drive home to the ranch.

There was the drone of an automotive engine; soon headlights brightened the curtains over the window front. Ross came from the bathroom carrying his case. He looked better. He had one boot on and was carrying the other. He stopped when he saw her standing there. "Oh. Ain't you gone back to bed? Say, look, you can drive yourself home, can't you? It's only a couple, three hours." He had his hat on. He looked very tall; a man proportioned to this strange cavern of a room. With his trousers on it was impossible to tell about his leg unless he moved, as he did then, setting his case on the rack by the door and catching his balance with his fingertips. "Yes, I can drive myself home," she answered.

He looked intently at her. "Say, her ain't mad, is her? I can't help this damn leg." She smiled to show she was not. Was she? No. She was relieved. There was a banging on the door.

"That must be George. Wonder how in hell he found this place so fast." She smiled again. "Probably the only lighted window in the motel, Ross." He grinned. "You're too smart. You must be one of those girls who knows when to come in out of a snowstorm. Why don't you climb back in bed and shut that light off?"

He moved toward her, steadying himself by taking and holding her tightly. The brim of his hat hit as he bent to kiss her.

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Courtesy of the Zeizler Collection, New York.

Three Poems by James Laughlin

Les Amants

In Magritte's painting *Les Amants* a man and a woman are kissing. But it can't be much fun because they have cloths over their heads so they can't see each other.
I know two lovers who could not see each other correctly. They kissed a lot but what they saw was not really the other person. It was a person each one had made up. This made them unhappy but they couldn't stop doing it. They had to make each other up.

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Double Self-Portrait, *1915. Attributed to Private Collection, Switzerland in Alessandra Comini:* Egon Schiele, *Braziller, 1976.*

The Doppelgängers

Egon Schiele knew that he was two people
there was no doubt about it Romain Gary

wanted to be two people but he made a
mess of it and shot himself Schiele did

better he knew that two men needed two
girls and when he saw the Harms sisters

he hung nude pictures of himself out the
window to court them he married Edith &

Adele became his affectionate model all
were content with this arrangement and

Schiele died naturally of influenza.

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The French

are such an orderly race
it is reported that the

grande horizontale Liane
de Pougy would offer to

her lovers only the up-
per part of her body be-

cause the lower part was
reserved for her husband.

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Stanley Plumly

Against Starlings

1

Their song is almost painful the way it
penetrates the air—above the haze and
level of the fields a thin line drawn. A
wire. Where the birdcall goes to ground. But I'd
stand anyway under the oaks lining
the road and whistle, tireless with chances,
tossing, by the handful, the crushed stone.
All of them answered, none of them came down.
By evening there'd be hundreds filling the
trees past hearing, black along the branches.
They'd go off with the guns like buckshot, black,
filling the sky, falling. I held my ears.
The holes in the air closed quickly, then healed.
Birds were bloodless, like smoke, wind in a field—

2

But not to be confused with the cowbird,
its brown head, its conical sparrow's bill,
nor with the red-wing, which is obvious,
even showy, blood or birthmark, nor with
the boat-tailed grackle—though at dusk, when they
gathered from the north, they were all blackbirds.
They were what the night brought, and the blown leaves,
and the cloud come down in the rain. The ease
of it, the way summer could be ending.
When I found one one morning it was the
color of oil in a pool of water,
bronze, blue-green, still shining. The parts that were
missing were throwaway, breast and belly
and the small ink and eye-ring of the eye—

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3

Not to be compared with the last native
wild pigeon, trap shot high in Pike County,
Ohio, the fourth day of spring, nineteen
hundred—thirty years after the harvest
of millions filled the buffalo trains east.
They were, by report, "the most numerous
bird ever to exist on earth," what the
Narragansett called *Wuskowhan*, the blue
dove, the wanderer, whose flight is silent.
Not to be compared with the smaller, wild
mourning dove, which haunted the afternoon,
which you heard all day till dark. They
were the sound in my sleep those long naps home,
the last train calling down the line in time—

4

Sometimes, at the far end of a pasture,
the burdock and buckwheat thick as the grass
along the hedgework, you could still find nests,
some fallen, some you had to climb to. They
were a kind of evidence, a kind of
science, sticks, straw, and brilliant bits of glass.
My mother had a hat like that, feathered
flawed—she'd bought it used. It was intricate
and jewelled, the feathers scuffed like a jay's,
and so stiff you could've carried water.
The millinery species is over.
Those nests had nothing in them. Still, sometimes
I'd wait until the autumn light was gone,
the sky half eggshell, half a starling's wing—

5

Not to be compared with the fluted voice,
the five phrases in different pitches
of the thrush, the one Whitman heard, and Keats.
Sturnus vulgaris vulgaris—not to
be confused with the soft talk and music,

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the voice that calls the spirit from the wood.
Those that stayed the winter sat the chimney
to keep warm, and cried down the snow to fly
against the cold. They were impossible.
They'd be dead before spring, or disappear
into the white air. —Not to be confused
with the black leaves whirling up the windward
side of the house, caught in the chimney smoke,
the higher the more invisible—

6

Black.
I saw them cover the sky over a
building once, and storm an alley. They were
a gathering, whole. Yet on the window
sill, individual, stealing the grain
I put there, they'd almost look at me through
the glass. Something magical, practical.
They'd even graze the ground for what had dropped.
I wished for one to come into the house,
and left the window open just enough.
None ever did. That was another year.
What is to be feared is emptiness and
nothing to fill it. I threw a stone or
I didn't throw a stone is one language—
the vowel is a small leaf on the tongue.

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Two Poems by Killarney Clary

Green beetles tick against the lighted windows. The crickets stay. I'm irritable on the phone, feel I'm supposed to entertain you, but I've had a stupid day and my only thought is full of complaint. You're tired, and the delay on the long-distance line causes us to interrupt each other and to say with a harsh edge, "I can't hear you; I'm sorry."

It isn't worth hearing; I'm talking because if I didn't something would be wrong. "Lock up." "Get some sleep." "Where will you be tomorrow?" "There's a jet going over. Wait."

We mean it when we way, "Be careful," and yet it seems now we aren't meant to talk. Talk is the pool-sweep and renewal notice, or else just a reminder that we're on the phone. What we tell about ourselves and friends snarls and tightens into a patient, black seed. No one bit reaches us both at once and when we try to share what we've found separately, the unbodied meanings mumble and poke.

Trouble is camouflaged and of a prehistoric shape, angular, armored and full of endurance. Each tear is streamlined. The method is passed on in a gesture; this is how to be treated and this is how to treat. If the culprit has a voice, it dipped or soared out of our range before we were born. There's no place to stop. Let's get on with it.

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He said, "Remember what it is you are afraid of; you aren't afraid of me." And I wondered—can't we just wait on the porch between the certain rooms and the accident on the freeway, late in the rain?

I mistook my carefulness for honesty. I waited to tell him. Now the porch screen waves on its broken hinge, barely, as the rain falls straight and warm and the last chance has gone on its way through the night in a rush.

"Who is he anyway?" I ask as I turn back. I take it slowly—my bare feet curve down to the floor; my tongue waits, constant as an ocean, against the back of my teeth. I can forget, sometimes, what I need to forget.

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Actual Size

Robert Greene

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Five Poems by Michael Hofmann

Old Firm

Father, the bird writing writes bird's nest soup—
a frail, disciplined structure, spun from its spittle
with bits of straw and dirt, then boiled with beaten
eggs . . .
It kept us fed till we were big enough to leave the nest.

We walked, *à trois*, to the end of the road, for my bus
to Riem, and the plane to Gatwick, seemingly
chartered by the *Bierfest* . . . A sudden thunderstorm
turned us into a family group: mother under her umbrella,

you hiding in a phone-box, kindly holding the door open,
and me, giving no protection, and pretending
not to seek any either, wet and deserting and plastered,
like the hair making itself scarce on your bad head . . .

That morning you played me an interview you gave in
French,
a language you hadn't spoken in my lifetime,
literally not since my birth, when you'd been in Toulouse,
on French leave . . . Now, we joked about it—

you were easier to understand than the interviewer!
Who else understood? Your edgy, defeated laugh?
The modest, unhopeful evangelism of your final appeal
to the people of Montreal not to stop reading?

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Vortex

Where was our high water mark? Was it the glorious
oriental scimitar in the Metropolitan Museum
in New York? Nothing for a pussyfooting shake-hands grip:
your hand had to be a fist already to hold it. . .
I wondered why the jewels were all clustered
on scabbard and hilt and basketed hand-guard,
why there were none on the sword itself.
I could only guess that the blade leapt out
to protect them, like a strong father his family.

Or next door, where, as the guide explained,
there was a deity in the ceiling, who would shower
genius or intellect or eyewash on those beneath?
And straightaway, to my fierce embarrassment,
you pushed me under it, an un-European moment—
though I tried also to relish the shiver of limelight.

Or was it more even, less clinching, the many years
I used the basin after you had shaved in it?
It was my duty to shave the basin, rinsing
the circle of hairs from its concave enamel face
till it was as smooth as yours. . . I was almost there,
on the periphery of manhood, but I didn't have your gear:
the stiff brush of real badger (or was it beaver?);
the secretive cake of shaving soap; the safety razor
that opened like Aladdin's cave when I twirled the handle.

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. . . That movement became an escape mechanism:
I was an orphan, a street Arab, waiting for you
in international lounges, at the foot of skyscrapers;
entertaining myself with the sprinkler nozzles
secreted in the ceiling, whirling dervishes
sniffing out smoke, in a state of permanent readiness;
or with the sprung, centrifugal, stainless ashtrays
that have since emancipated me, like the razors,
—cheapskate, disposable, no moving parts—
I now use myself . . . The water drains away, laughing.
I light up, a new man.

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Withdrawn from Circulation

My window gave onto a street-corner where the air-currents
(*Berliner Luft!*) were of such bewildering complexity
that the snow, discouraged, fell back up the sky. . .

It stayed shut, and I sweated in the central heat
as I sweated in my pyjamas at night, snug as a worm
in my slithery tapering orange-and-green sleeping bag.

For a whole month, the one soiled bedsheet
was supposed to knit together, to join in matrimony
the shiny blue tripartite mattress, borrowed or looted

from a ruined office, but good as new.
Small wonder I hugged it in sleep! On the floor
lay the door that was to have made me a table.

It was said there was nothing between here and Siberia—
except Poland—but indoors was the tropics.
I was eighteen, and frittering away.

I picked up just enough politics to frighten my mother,
and the slick, witless phrases I used about girls
were a mixture of my father's and those I remembered

from *Mädchen* or *Bravo* . . . Nothing quite touched me.
I put on weight, smoked Players and read Dickens
for anchorage and solidity. Come the autumn,

I was going to Cambridge. A few doors down
was the cellar where the R.A.F. kept the Berlin Senator
they had kidnapped and were holding to ransom.

From time to time, his picture appeared
in the newspapers, authenticated by other newspapers
in the picture with him. He was news that stayed news.

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Don John of Austria

The population kept changing downstairs: single women,
unmarried mothers, whole families of petty criminals . . .
A former Miss Austria lived in a pub
round the corner. Old women managed hens
and vegetable gardens, and walked parallel to the ground.
The powerful Herr Briesnigg came to cut the grass
once a fortnight, his hair cropped closer than Bismarck's,
a cigar between his lips, and his square fingers
lubricating the throats of a couple of beer bottles
like a couple of thirsty women.

Afternoons were swingtime. I followed the tuba's trochees,
the jolly military gambollings, the *pom*pom ostinato
on every single song Frau Kräuth ever played . . .
The flat afternoon sunlight left a spectrum on my wall
where it bled from the cut-glass of a lamp.
One sister went with a boy who offered her violence
(once he knocked himself out against a wall), the other
with her maths teacher, a calculating, durable heart-throb.
Her white flared jeans were cut like cocktail glasses,
so tight, they were attended by gynecological com-
plications.

Summer and winter,
I walked through the maize-field,
six feet of feed-crop or six feet of snow.
I told skinny blue-eyed Gerda I was partial to her,
but her schoolmarmish mother, a vigilant divorcee,
wouldn't have it . . . She was too innocent—
a fellow-member of the Alpine Flower Society
gave her a baby. A night,
the single chalk-white beam of a searchlight
went up over the airport, crying to high heaven.

In ten years, I never learned the names of the streets.
There were half a dozen yellow rubble churches,
a statue of a dragon and a clubman,

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some safe clothes-shops. The only amenity
was Mini Mundus, world-famous buildings waist-high . . .
My mother's preferred cobbler knew no lost causes.
Herr Fuiko repaired everything, he had a gold cup
for men's shoes, and a silver one for ladies.
Bernhard Bauer, my sister's best friend's brother,
was junior mini-golf champion of all Austria.

The one window of opportunity was the glazed, blasé
notice-board where the Catholic press sat in judgment
on Westerns and Italo-Westerns, porn and home-grown
comic porn.
They all came alike to the censor — and to my father and
me,
who went to practically everything with decent action . . .
In the trailers you could see what you were missing,
like the corners of Happy Families cards. Breathtaking—
while our man was getting stuck in the heart-shaped hole
in the shutter, or trying the wrong window altogether,
a woman was picking over dildoes like a box of chocolates.

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Giro Account

Out of the pornographic cinema at the station,
with the fast clock and the continuous program,
then past the French sweet-stall, the naturist magazines

and the cretin at the lottery ticket-office
—*das schnelle Glück*: a quick buck or fuck—
and into the night train to Berlin . . .

It was sealed and non-stop, but East German border
guards
woke us up so they could give us our transit visas,
and then it was early on Sunday, and I walked

out of *Berlin-Zoo* in my father's lion coat,
his suitcase in one hand and his bag in the other.
I was nineteen and a remittance man,

embarked on a delirium of self-sufficiency,
surprised that it was possible to live like a bird:
to stay in a hotel, to eat in restaurants,

and draw my father's money from a giro account.
At the end of my feeding-tube, I didn't realize
that to stay anywhere on the earth's surface is to bleed:

money, attention, effort . . . It was no problem.
I avoided my companions—the cold young man
with the Inca cap, the weak heart and the blue face,

his obese, scatologically-brained sister — and stared
incessantly at a Peruvian woman in a night-club.
I talked to a girl who one day told me she'd got engaged.

The motherly hotel-manageress gave me the rolls
left over from my breakfast for the rest of the day.
Once she gave me my father on the telephone.

I asked him about his conference, but he wanted
something else: to have me at the end of a telephone
line, an alibi, proof of my harmlessness—

he had become jealous of a spivvy young Englishman . . .
There was no crime, no conference, maybe no Englishman:
only my father, his son and his new novel plot.

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Jim Carroll

from NYC Variations

I have walked these streets so often I could
forge the shadows of skyscrapers as they fall
to rest between the sculptured air of midtown.

Air-conditioned blood drips like rosaries
from glassy facades to the cosmopolitan eye

The fantasies of secretaries are washed to the streets
or trampled beneath thick heels along subway platforms

Engineers in orange helmets point out the flawlessness
of buildings which do not yet exist. My hands

Would drip with boredom or lust. It was time
for evening in Time's Square. There the dim-witted clouds
at once unbuttoned, revealing a nasty aperture beneath
blue cables.

***

The thick veins on back my forearm
like the rope of an acrobat
have risen again

As a line of demarcation
between fields of battle
which vacillate easily but with some small pain
across this flux of anguish between light and dark
past and future ash and flowering flame

***

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In midtown again the way you stop
Casually to finger your hair
In some gray drugstore window
Across 53rd St. The Museum of Modern Art
That poverty vault

I fell right through the deep there once
I felt the light of Nolde scratch beneath my fingernails
And I found poverty once more

So much poverty It follows me through subway cars
Poverty to die a death within one's own family
Poverty of the darkness across ice Poverty of cataract eyes
Poverty of young men alone behind the stairway
  who practice
Alchemy inside bottle caps who know
The altruism of a last syringe.

***

When he was young in Harlem my father
watched the shadow of St. Anne, the mother
of Our Virgin, walking with shadowed gown
round a church rotunda, white as chalk and swept
with decals of starry blue why should I not believe him?

I cannot return. Never go back. Yet my father's word
has weight in its edges to stand straight like shields
and here I wait in the exhaust of his space and time
rolling my wrist with bandage to check the flow
of spit from the veins, the mucous music sticks
to fixtures on top these hotel dreams, parking lots
behind the Chelsea on West 22nd crowded with monolith
  lungs and dew
piles of dancing shoes . . . some guitar claws.

***

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Here I walk with a memory of workers in midtown
returning at day's end to the safe edge of home near water

Streets abandoned to a purer grace, until the summit
of tall buildings is where the light of evening sleeps

And in the slit shadow below, blasting my way
through the taxied vapor, I finger the turbine mist

I wait on the origin of night's sounds waking. I know
that here only the blind man sings, even in rain

The notes of drenched violins rise like warped mirrors
and the last clouds part slowly, like a cracked wheel.

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A first draft of Leon Edel's review of Robert Holmes's Footsteps, *written for* The Washington Post.

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Leon Edel inspecting the garden at Monk's House, home of Virginia and Leonard Woolf.

The Art of Biography I
Leon Edel

About biography, Lytton Strachey once wrote, "We do not reflect that it is perhaps as difficult to write a good life as it is to live one." In our own time, Leon Edel—a literary biographer for over fifty years—is the most notable practioner of his craft. Edel is best known for his five-volume Life of Henry James, *a project that took over twenty years to research and write and for which he won both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award in 1963. In 1976, Edel received the Gold Medal in Biography from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. Edel also completed E.K.*

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Brown's biography of Willa Cather in 1953 (Brown died while at work on it), and in more recent years has written a group biography, Bloomsbury: A House of Lions *(1979), a volume of essays on literary psychology,* Stuff of Sleep and Dreams *(1982), a widely disseminated pamphlet-life of Henry David Thoreau (1970), a great deal of material about James Joyce, and also about the psychological novel. He has recently completed a four-volume edition of Henry James's* Selected Letters, *and has edited four volumes of Edmund Wilson's journals, the most recent of which,* The Fifties, *will be published this spring by Farrar, Straus & Giroux. In addition, Edel has spoken and written extensively on the art of biography, what he calls his "Principia Biographica."* Literary Biography, *taken from his series of Alexander Lectures, was published in 1957, and* Writing Lives, *an updated compendium of his work on the subject, was published in 1984. A one-volume edition of the* Life of Henry James *was published by Harper & Row in November, 1985.*

Leon Edel was born on September 9, 1907, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and spent most of his childhood in Canada, growing up on the Saskatchewan frontier. He received his BA and MA from McGill University in Montreal, and his doctorate from the Sorbonne in Paris. Returning to the States during the Depression, Edel worked as a journalist for seventeen years, taking time out to serve in the Second World War, during which he was engaged mainly in psychological warfare and was attached to Patton's Third Army. After the war, in 1949, Edel published his first work on Henry James: edited versions of James's Complete Plays *and* The Ghostly Tales of Henry James. *Soon after, he accepted a teaching position at New York University, where he later held the Henry James Chair in English and American Letters from 1966–1973. Today, Edel lives with his wife, the writer Marjorie Sinclair, in Honolulu, where from 1972–1979 he occupied a post-retirement chair at the University of Hawaii called the Citizens Chair.*

When the prospect of an interview on the art of biography first came up, so did the issue of geography. Quite simply, Edel

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was in Honolulu, the interviewer, New York. With characteristic generosity, Edel offered a solution. "Will you come to Honolulu?" he wrote, "an ocean and a continent away? You are welcome to conduct the sessions here in my study on a hilltop overlooking the city, a fine green place with an intrusive sleek cat, plumeria trees, cooing doves and general quiet." Tempting as it was, the meeting in Hawaii was preempted by the Edels' visit to New York last spring. This interview was conducted in their room at the Westbury Hotel during two consecutive mornings in mid-May. Now in his seventies, Leon Edel is a small man with a soft voice and a ready smile. We sat in armchairs by the window of his hotel room, with a tape recorder on a glass tabletop between us. Often, to stress a point, Edel would lean in towards the machine and raise his voice slightly to be sure he was heard over the rumblings of traffic on Madison Avenue. At other times, Edel would quote long passages by memory, then double-check the quotation in one of the many books or notepads piled neatly beside him. A seasoned biographer, Edel is well aware of the importance of accuracy—yet his assiduous checking proved to be mere formality. He invariably got each quotation right, word for word, a feat he noted with a broad smile and a slight twinkle in his eyes. After our last session together, the Edels took me to a celebratory lunch, where we discussed everything from Marjorie's work—she has recently written the biography of a Hawaiian princess—to Edmund Wilson's sex life, and shared the first wild strawberries of the season.

INTERVIEWER

What moves one to write a biography, to spend that much time in somebody else's life?

LEON EDEL

It's a little like falling in love; at any rate that's the way it usually begins. You never know how long the affair or the infatuation will last. Of course, it's a one-sided love affair since the love object is dead or, if alive, relatively unwooable. Most

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biographies are begun out of enchantment or affection; you read a poem and want to find the poet, you hear a statesman and are filled with admiration, or you are stirred by the triumphs of a general or an admiral. In the writing of the life changes occur, discoveries are made. Realities emerge. The love affair, however exhilarating, has to be terminated if a useful biography is to emerge. Sometimes there is disenchantment and even hate; the biographer feels deceived. Isn't that the way all love affairs run—from dream and cloud-journey to earth-firmness?

INTERVIEWER

Of course, we're talking about one kind of biography here; there are other kinds.

EDEL

Yes, the kind written by journalists and hacks to cash in on a new reputation or a horrendous crime; the quest for the Boston stranglers and the off-beat kinkiness that leads to murder; the material of *In Cold Blood* and *The Executioner's Song* . . . though the latter are not the works of hack writers, but novelists trying to put reality into fiction. The great and important biographies, however, derive from feelings akin to love and are written because the biographer feels a need to explore the given life regardless of publisher-interest and possible success. Since we are focusing on biography as an art, let me put it this way: biography for better or worse is an involvement with another person; if the biographer forms an attachment or is "hooked," the affair can last for years. It acquires, at any rate, a history of its own, a very complex history.

INTERVIEWER

How did you originally become interested in Henry James?

EDEL

That's indeed a complex history. It began when I was a student of eighteen. And it started with James Joyce, not Henry James. In 1926, I heard stories about Joyce's banned book *Ulysses*

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and what an oppressed author he was; nobody wanted to publish him. I sympathized; I explored. I finally got a smuggled copy. For a youth of eighteen the prose was dazzling. I thought of Joyce as a kind of Paganini of prose: a trickster who carried all English literature in his head. I was fascinated by the way Joyce tried to put the reader into the minds of his characters—that long soliloquy of Molly Bloom's, the way Joyce flitted from Bloom's thoughts into street smells and street incidents and then back into the stream of consciousness. Great stuff! Did I fall in love with Joyce? No, he wasn't lovable. But he was a great performer and youth likes performance. So I went to my favorite professor and announced I would write a dissertation on the "stream of consciousness" in Joyce. "Impossible," said the professor. Joyce was forty. His book wasn't available. There were only some poems, *Dubliners*, and *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. And anyhow, he was alive; at that time you wrote dissertations only on the dead, whose work was complete and who could be fully appraised.

INTERVIEWER

How did Joyce lead you to Henry James?

EDEL

My professor said to me during our conversation that James seemed to him really the man who had anticipated all the new writers. "Henry James? Who's he?" I asked. My professor told me he was an American writer, just ten years dead, and I would find all his works in the library. Off I went, and there he was: thirty-five volumes of novels and tales in the old Macmillan edition, blue and gold, very crisp and new. His titles were beautiful—*The Wings of the Dove*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Golden Bowl*. I carried home the two-volume *Wings* and started reading. Often I only half understood. It moved slowly and with difficulty, but it was startling and strange to someone like myself who had read Charles Dickens and Mark Twain and James Fenimore Cooper. I began to dip into the two volumes of his letters. They were grandiose. And then I read that he had tried to write plays for five years and been booed off the stage.

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Somehow that episode fascinated me; it shocked me that a man so delicate and refined could receive this kind of treatment. I went back to my professor and we ended up with a compromise: I could write on James as a psychological novelist and smuggle in a chapter on Joyce, and Virginia Woolf, whom I also was reading. That was how I came to the moderns, at that early time.

INTERVIEWER

Where did you go from there?

EDEL

I had put myself through college working on a local paper in Montreal. After graduation and a year's work I found myself dissatisfied—the life of a reporter somehow wasn't what I wanted. So I applied for a fellowship to go abroad. I thought only of Paris and the Joycean world. In Quebec at the time the government had sold a great deal of liquor in their liquor-control stores to thirsty prohibition-starved Americans who crossed the border weekends, creating a great tourist industry. The provincial government decided to make a gesture out of its opulence to humanism and the arts; the result, a dozen fellowships a year for European study. I was carried across the Atlantic on the alcoholic profits, ostensibly to study French journalism. In Paris, I hung around the writing crowd, admired Hemingway from a distance, watched Joyce at the opera applauding an Irish singer, frequented Sylvia Beach's bookshop where I met the young Cyril Connolly; I went to Brittany for a holiday, to Concarneau, a port filled then with red and blue sails of the tuna fleet, ran into Allen Tate and Caroline Gordon, and Léonie Adams, who were there, and they took me in Paris to meet Ford Madox Ford so he could talk to me about Henry James, which he did, leaning on a grand piano and wheezing like a walrus. I was a junior hanger-on of the expatriates in Montparnasse, hearing the far-off rumbles of panic and the Wall Street crash. Then I pulled myself together. It dawned on me that I would go back to a changed world and I had better find something to show for my stay abroad. Also, I had to have progress reports to get my fellowship renewed—it was good for three years if

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I showed myself serious and industrious. I made friends with a gifted young Canadian from Toronto named E.K. Brown, whose life of Willa Cather I would later complete when he died prematurely. It was he who took me to see the French professor of American Literature and Civilization, and this professor, Charles Cestre, urged me to go on with my Jamesian studies. I offered to do a dissertation on James's five years of failed playwriting.

INTERVIEWER

So your study of James's plays anticipated the biography?

EDEL

The idea of a biography never occurred to me at that time. I had to investigate those mysterious five years of drama-writing, which I began to call James's "dramatic years."

INTERVIEWER

How did you launch your investigation?

EDEL

First, I read all of James's published novels: all thirty-five volumes, and magazine stuff still uncollected. Then I made inquiries and learned that James's produced plays were in London, but I'd have to get permission from the James executor to get at them. The plays were in the Lord Chamberlain's Office where copies had been placed at the time of production to fulfill British censorship requirements. Would you believe that this old custom was still observed until late in this century? James had four plays produced; and after getting permission from the family, I sat in a little office in St. James's Palace—very appropriate!—where I was allowed to bring my typewriter. Of course, this was long before the age of Xerox. One thing led to another. I met James's last secretary, Theodora Bosanquet, a remarkable woman, and she looked up her old diaries and told me James had corresponded with Bernard Shaw. So I wrote to Shaw who immediately received me and gave me a discourse on how good James's plays would have been if he

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had written them like Shaw plays. He was marvellously articulate; he marched up and down his long study talking *at* me, but actually losing himself in his spoken prose. He talked in completely punctuated sentences. Anyway, the end result of my researches in London and Paris, during which I met various persons who had known James—including Edith Wharton—was that I wrote two dissertations for a Sorbonne *doctorat-d'état*, appeared before a board of examiners, five solemn French professors who gave me a hard time—it's a public event—and finally grudgingly declared me a doctor of letters. Then I went back to Canada, and to the Depression.

INTERVIEWER

With the thought of doing a biography of James?

EDEL

No, I felt I'd done with James. And I needed a job. So I drifted back into journalism—where I remained, locked in that dead end for the next seventeen years. I did think I might turn my French thesis into a book, and having established relations with James's executor I received his permission to edit the complete plays of the novelist. There were twelve in all. But the drudgeries of journalism, the Depression of the thirties, flattened me out. Finally, however, I got a Guggenheim Fellowship to edit the plays. I returned to Europe and found new material, and then went to Harvard to continue my researches. The Jameses had deposited the family archive in the basement of the Widener Library and were expected to give it to Harvard, but for the present they still controlled access to it. I was supposed to deal exclusively with James's plays—but in an archive one has to look at everything in order to find the particular things one wants. That was how I found myself one day in a long underground room with very long tables and boxes and trunks and papers and letters everywhere: William James to Henry, Henry to William, Alice to her brothers, all neatly lined up, also letters of mama and papa James, piles of manuscripts, assorted books, and a large wooden box like an army footlocker labelled "Henry James." The secretary in charge said as far as she knew it had

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never been opened. I opened it. Neatly labelled items in the handwriting of Theodora Bosanquet, James's last secretary, were typescripts of the very plays I was looking for; also a few sheets labelled "Last Dictation." I read these and decided I would copy them—they were all about Napoleon and I wanted to study them. The dictation was like "stream of consciousness." A note from Bosanquet said that James during his last illness called for her and dictated these fragments, signing them "Napoleon"! Some time later I learned that the executor ordered the dictation destroyed because it showed the "disintegration" of Uncle Henry's mind. But I had put *my* copy in a safe-deposit box and published it years later, after the executor was dead. I also found a number of scribbles in James's handwriting with all kinds of notes, some about the plays. I decided I'd copy these too. I think it was in that room, with all those treasures around me opening the doors of the past, that I discovered my vocation as a biographer. Everything seemed filled with mystery and promise; there were all kinds of answers in those papers to the puzzles and secrets the novelist had left behind, residues of his complex being. But a number of years would elapse before I would really face this truth—the truth that I wanted to write a life of this man.

INTERVIEWER

What held you back?

EDEL

For one thing, I hadn't delivered on my project, the editing of the plays. I was sure of myself in that work, but otherwise I felt unsure and overwhelmed by what was involved. Years of journalism lead to a kind of sloth—unless you are in one of its special branches and have made it your career. I hadn't. I felt like someone who had access to a kind of fortune, but didn't know where to turn. Didn't know how to use it. So I decided I'd begin by copying a few pages of the hurried scribbles in James's notebooks, and spend the rest of the time reading the plays and examining their successive revisions, so as to establish publishable texts. Then one day I had an extraordinary ex-

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perience. I came on a passage in the notes which confirmed my long-ago hypothesis—that James's play-period had profoundly influenced the creation of his later novels. In that passage, James wrote, "Has a *part* of all this wasted passion and squandered time (of the last five years) been simply the precious lesson, taught me in that roundabout and devious, that cruelly expensive way, *of the singular value for a narrative plan too* of this (I don't know *what* adequately to call it, the) divine principle of the Scenario . . . a key, that, working in the same *general* way fits the complicated chambers of *both* the dramatic and narrative lock?" My old hunch, that had grown into my Paris thesis, found itself validated in the Master's own words. I suppose this discovery gave me a measure of confidence. But by the time I'd finished my Guggenheim year, the Hitler war was upon us. I ended up taking three years out for soldiering under Patton in Europe, and a year in Germany, in the military government.

INTERVIEWER

And through all this, did you still think of James and Joyce?

EDEL

As you may imagine, my mind was on other things. I dreamed of trying to write a novel like *War and Peace*, now that I had been a soldier and moved in a great swirl of history; but that was just a passing fancy, a Mitty-dream, and I told myself that my real skills lay in biography—that this was the way I best could express myself. Yet, even so, James followed me. During the war itself, I dug up some of his letters.

INTERVIEWER

How was that?

EDEL

It's a funny story. I was at the liberation of Paris. I was in a special group of French linguists who went into Paris with De Gaulle—he was at the head of our procession. I met a publisher one day who had heard that I was interested in James.

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He asked me if James had been translated into French; he was interested in publishing him (and he did, he published quite a bit of James after the war). I said to the publisher, what I really wanted to know is if James's letters to Alphonse Daudet are still around, and the publisher said, "His son Lucien is in the phone book. Why don't you call him up?" So I called, and there was this tired voice at the other end. I said I was an American soldier who was interested in Henry James, and I had some spare hours at the end of the day, could I come and see him? He had a very courteous and gentle voice. He said, come along. I didn't ask him on the phone if he had any letters, but I asked if he remembered James. And he said, yes, he remembered James's visits to his family. I trotted over to his place; he was still in the old family apartment on the Left Bank, near the Invalides. It was a very elegant apartment. When I arrived, he was bundled up in bed—there was no heat then, and he was a very old man. And when I walked in, there were the James letters laid out. He said, "I found James's letters to my father, here they are. Take them!" I said, "You're *giving* them to me?" He said, "Yes, I'm an old man, I'm going to die. They'll end up in the garbage if you don't take them." So I said, "I'll take them, but I'll see they get into a permanent collection. I'll donate them in your name." I read them, they were very good. I copied them, and mailed them to Harvard.

INTERVIEWER

When did the biography project actually come into being?

EDEL

Three years after I got out of the army, and had finally brought out my long-delayed *Complete Plays of Henry James*, an eight-hundred page book, I signed a contract with Lippincott, the old Philadelphia firm which had published the James plays, to write a life of Henry James.

INTERVIEWER

And did you originally plan that this would be a five-volume work?

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EDEL

Oh no. I planned a single volume, in three parts: the fledgling years, the middle years, and the age of mastery. I wrote the young James in three years and called it *The Untried Years*. This was Part One. I asked Lippincott to put it in their safe. I now had very comprehensive research to do for the middle years. Very soon George Stevens, their trade books chief and a man of considerable literary distinction, took me to lunch and asked me whether I'd mind if they published Part One as an independent book. "If that's the young Henry James, it can stand by itself." I became panicky. "What if I want to insert some further chapters? What if I find new letters?" He wasn't troubled by that. "This book stands by itself. If you want to insert some chapters do it now." I took it home and reread it. It was tempting to get the book out. But I warned him that he was committing me to serialization. He and my English publisher agreed that *The Untried Years* could stand even if I didn't write any sequels. I did insert some chapters. And I knew then, thinking of all the letters still unread—and that vast archive now presented to Harvard by the Jameses—that I'd have to face some knotty problems later on.

INTERVIEWER

What knotty problems?

EDEL

Well, I knew James's dramatic years [1890–95] in great detail but I still had a tremendous amount of research to do. There were thousands of letters to read, the greater part of all the material I had seen at Harvard. I was in New York and had just started teaching at New York University. My first volume had attracted attention and I was no longer a young man beginning a career. I was, to be exact, forty-six when *The Untried Years* came out.

INTERVIEWER

What sort of reception did the first volume get?

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EDEL

In England, the book received considerable praise, from those who had known James—Max Beerbohm and Harold Nicolson among others, and a newer generation like Graham Greene, Joyce Cary and Herbert Read. In the States, I got cautious reviews from the academics, but very little general notice—still, a good climate was created. Suddenly, I was recognized as the ranking Jamesian expert. Even though others had been breaking ground, I had a longer backward reach. After all, I had had a quarter of a century novitiate.

INTERVIEWER

So here you were, starting a new teaching job at NYU, and buried in research.

EDEL

Yes, and pretty soon I was floundering. The residual Jamesians abroad went to their attics and, with their sublime confidence in the British Post Office, kept mailing me big bundles of his letters—without even registering the packages! My desk was piled. I knew the grand lines of James's career, but I had by no means sorted out the details. And I had very little time to go to Cambridge to read steadily in the James archive. It took me ten years to get my bearings and master my materials, including an entire year at Harvard dictating data from James letters and other documents into a tape recorder. It was clear to me that my subject was large enough to require some hard thought about how it might be treated. The unexpected letters that belonged in the first volume did turn up, and then I began to realize I was free to devise my own form. I could use flashbacks for new materials that, chronologically, belonged earlier. And as I kept finding surprises of one sort and another, I created a kind of fluid nonchronological episodic story. I'd started too many hares in the published volume to be able to turn back to conventional chronological biography. I was creating a serial and it could be a cliffhanger if my material allowed for this.

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INTERVIEWER

If you didn't really have anything more than a general plan, then you had no idea where you would end up, what shape the biography would take?

EDEL

No. I invented my form as I went along. At one point, for example, it became clear that I had to deal with the strange friendship between James and Constance Fenimore Woolson—she an old maid who loved him, he a fastidious bachelor who was being kind to her but keeping himself distinctly at a distance. I decided to drop one part of my story to tell this phase. In effect I was doing what all the old novelists did: tell one part of the story, then turn to another part; then turn back—the narrative mode of suspense, as old as Homer. In the first volume I'd intuitively planted all my themes in the first four chapters; like Ibsen, I placed my pistols in the first act, knowing the audience would expect me to produce them in the third. Having James's last dictation about Napoleon, I planted the Napoleonic theme; then the "museum world" theme; the relationship with his brother, and so on, and my structure took its form from my themes. Expediency, you see, made me artful. My total work was built on a series of continual discoveries and adjustments. Then my volumes grew longer; the second volume became two volumes.

INTERVIEWER

For which you won both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award.

EDEL

Yes, though why they gave me the Pulitzer before I'd finished my entire job I can't imagine. I suspect they thought I *had* finished it. Then, my final volume broke into two and there they were—five volumes. My morbid fear was that public interest would peter out, but it didn't. My last volume sold much more than the first. The movement was upward all along.

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INTERVIEWER

I want to come back to something you said earlier. Is biography really an art or is it, in fact, a structural piecing together of fragments—a form of carpentry?

EDEL

There is carpentry involved, of course, but what I was doing was finding a form to suit my materials as I went along, having from the first given myself a large design. The moment you start shaping a biography, it becomes more than a mere assemblage of facts, mere use of lumber and nails—you are creating a work of art. I think I was performing like a dramatist when I planted my pistols ahead of time, and like a novelist when I did a flashback—incorporating retrospective chapters as I moved from theme to theme, character to character, showing the hero making mistakes and correcting them, facing adversity and learning from experience, growing older and having his particular kind of artistic and intellectual adventures, writing novels applauded in England and decried in America or being attacked in England amid the cheers of his countrymen back home. I had James's Europe as my scene, and his bold way of annexing foreign territory to his American subjects. Above all, I was working toward what would be the climax of my serialization—those five intense years of dramatic writing, when he failed miserably, and then pulled himself together to write his last novels. All this required what I like to call the biographical imagination, the imagination of form. As biographers, we are not allowed to imagine our facts.

INTERVIEWER

How would you describe the nature of the biographical art beyond the technique of narrative?

EDEL

I believe the secret of biography resides in finding the link between talent and achievement. A biography seems irrelevant if it doesn't discover the overlap between what the individual

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did and the life that made this possible. Without discovering that, you have shapeless happenings and gossip. The difference between one kind of biographer and another may be measured by the quantity of poetry infused into the narrative of life and *doing*—the poetry of existence, of trial and error, initiation and discovery, rites of passage and development, the inevitabilities of aging, or the truncated lives, Keats, Byron and others, who died young and yet somehow burned like bright flames. This kind of writing requires patience, assiduity, also enthusiasm, feeling, and certainly a sense of the biographer's participation. The biographer is a presence in life-writing, in charge of handling the material, establishing order, explaining and analyzing the ambiguities and anomalies. Biography is dull if it's just dates and facts: it has for too long ignored the entire province of psychology and the emotions. Ultimately, there must be a sense of the inwardness of human beings as well as outwardness: the ways in which we make dreams into realities, the way fantasies become plays and novels and poems—or the general who fights a great battle, Nelson and Trafalgar, Wellington and Waterloo, Washington and Valley Forge, the defeated Napoleon and *his* Waterloo—the strivings and the failings. It involves finding the links between the body and the spirit or soul in which human beings seem to rise above weakness and struggle.

INTERVIEWER

The links between poet and poem, politician and politics, generals and battles are one distinct part. Isn't there a lot more?

EDEL

Oh yes! To continue our building metaphor, the reader must get a sense of the girders, the structural steel, the consistencies and ambiguities of existence, the ways in which individuals grow and shrink and shrivel, or suddenly burst into flame and burn up. The world is full of snapshots; but these are single moments of existence, brief flashes of public or private history and often arranged beforehand by the photographer or TV camera. The biographer must be inside the narrative as well as outside—a quest for an active imagination at its work: James writing

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The Wings of the Dove, or Churchill at the helm of a world war. There is the teller and the tale, and the teller must be capable of handling the poetry and the humor, the richness and poverty of existence. And there's more: the use of words, the question of style, the way the materials are melted down, the supreme art of summary, the delicate use of other persons' mail, the modes of saying and doing, and now with the sexual revolution the capability to be frank about physical matters, which Victorian biography always kept hidden. There is all this. Each subject establishes its area of relevance. Hemingway offers us the *macho* relevance. Thoreau's self-contemplation is at the center of his using Walden as a huge mirror for himself. And then the complex ones—Napoleon who seemed to possess the art of facing the impossible, the art of contingency, and so on.

INTERVIEWER

So then, what is the essential difference between a biographer and a novelist?

EDEL

The difference between a novelist and a biographer resides in the biographer's having to master a narrative of inquiry. Biography has to explain and examine the evidence. The story is told brushstroke by brushstroke like a painter, and the biographer often has to say he simply doesn't know—he cannot fill in the gaps. There's so much that can never be known, whereas the omniscient novelist can be—well, omniscient, something impossible in biography.

INTERVIEWER

Can you talk a bit about a biographer's relation to the subject?

EDEL

You'll remember I began by saying most biographies start with a love affair, a very peculiar one. There are endless mementos, a kind of created relationship, because biographer and subject move on the same level of history. You read your subject's letters, you make friends and enemies with the sub-

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ject's friends and enemies, you are often as identified with the image as a novelist is identified, while writing a novel, with the hero or the heroine. Sometimes the love collapses during the research; at other times it is reinforced. There is always an air of mystery—every box of letters you open, every attic in which you rummage, becomes filled with the emotions of the biographer's involvement. Freud long ago described this as a latching-on to some aspect of the subject that has belonged to one's earlier years; the subject may have a familiar smile, or a facial resemblance, or offer some hint of some likeable person in the past, a parent, a favorite uncle, a nanny, some figure of our schooldays. It's a little like America's love affair with Ronald Reagan. He could recite nursery rhymes on TV and his admirers would say, "Isn't he great? Doesn't he communicate!" But what does he communicate? Something upbeat, a grin, a wisecrack; he tells us that this is a glorious world and he will take care of everything. That's the early phase of biography in which a subject can do no wrong, an infatuation stage. In psychology, this is called a "transference."

INTERVIEWER

In what ways does biographical transference manifest itself over time?

EDEL

If the biographer remains infatuated we get a hero-worshipping biography. Many such are written. But a biographer in touch with realities sooner or later comes out of the involvement. Biographical transference takes many forms. It can be so powerful that the biographer after spending a lifetime gathering materials isn't able to get the life down on paper. Some strong inhibition occurs. I've known such would-be biographers—one young biographer who followed a living novelist all over Europe, drank with him, developed a friendship, they corresponded, the subject was helpful and willing to be questioned . . . and then the friendship stood in the way. Nothing the young man could put down seemed good enough; or, in the fantasy, there remained a fear that perhaps the sub-

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ject wouldn't like it. The history of Boswell's dilemma after Johnson died fits what I'm saying. He'd had a long friendship with Johnson and it was one of continual admiration; Johnson had also liked Boswell's own genial candor. Boswell struggled to get the book written, but he finally had to get the help of a great scholar, Edmond Malone, who, being an outsider, could help give the narrative an objectivity Boswell didn't always have.

INTERVIEWER

Lytton Strachey is someone else you've cited in the past who actually went through a "transference" of sorts with his subject.

EDEL

Well, with him it was queens. Strachey wrote *Queen Victoria*, he wrote *Elizabeth and Essex*. You can take it any way you want. He was a homosexual, and he was a queen, too. He identified with them. He wanted to be a queen. Ruling, presiding over the destiny of other people.

INTERVIEWER

I wanted to get back to James and ask how you get started tracking your subject, especially one no longer living.

EDEL

You start almost anywhere. I've already described how I began by tracking James's plays. I wrote to the eldest son of William James, who was his father's and uncle's executor, and it was he who gave me permission to read the plays at the Lord Chamberlain's. Then there were the actors who had been in the plays. One was still acting in London. He didn't tell me much, but he brought some letters he got from the wife of the actor-manager who'd staged the play. He mentioned another individual who had known James; I wrote to him. I've described how from James's secretary I learned there'd been correspondence with Shaw. Shaw in turn told me that Granville-Barker read some of James's plays. A former actor, Allan Wade, work-

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ing in the British Museum (now the British Library) heard I was reading up on James as a playwright and came to my desk, and he was full of valuable information; we became very good friends.

INTERVIEWER

James was one of those people who feared his biographer and who sought to foil him, right?

EDEL

Well, James was a secretive person; he tried to frustrate future biographers by burning all the letters he received, but he couldn't burn those he had sent to others. I soon discovered everybody saved them because they were so warm and written in such an inimitable style. James invited his future biographers to seek him out in what he called the "invulnerable granite" of his art. That's so Jamesian—the "invulnerable granite." Well, I sought him there; it wasn't invulnerable at all. He talked in his travel writings about himself. He wrote two remarkable volumes of autobiography and left a fragment of a third. Even before I entered that room in the Widener which first housed his papers and the family's, I knew that I was going to be overwhelmed by material and that I'd have to find some way of dealing with it.

INTERVIEWER

It sounds like a potentially endless undertaking. You mention that James wrote thousands of letters. Did you ever become so overwhelmed with material that you gave up?

EDEL

I gave up a number of times. In a letter in the two volumes of James correspondence Percy Lubbock edited in 1920, I found James mentioning to his brother William that he had spent a weekend with Manton Marble. That was an odd name, but I found him in the *Dictionary of American Biography*. He had been one of Pulitzer's editors on the *World*, and a world authority on bi-metallism. A biographer develops a curious grave-

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yard memory. I pigeonholed the name. Once at the Library of Congress, looking over a list of the library's accessions, my eye caught the fact that it had just acquired the papers of Manton Marble. I went promptly to the manuscript division. Great libraries can't card index every item when they have a massive archive, they can only deliver boxes of stuff, and let you rummage. I was told the Marble papers were in huge scrapbooks; he had pasted in all his correspondence and masses of clippings. They wheeled in a cartload covering certain years and told me there were other cartloads I could have. Library carts are of varying sizes, and these were big, like luggage carts at a railway station. I spent three days turning pages. There was vast correspondence in the likely years—but it yielded me only three thank-you notes from James. I would have to spend months turning the pages of bi-metallic letters to and from very famous people, and I then and there decided that I would skip Mr. Marble and take the chance of being called negligent.

INTERVIEWER

And were there any repercussions?

EDEL

No, but there was an interesting sequel. About eight or ten years later I received a letter from the librarian of the London Library, then Mr. Simon Nowell-Smith, a dear friend. "I suppose this is the cross you have to bear," he wrote. Apparently, a lady had just called on him with more than a hundred letters from Henry James to Manton Marble, and asked whether she could present them to the library. Luckily, there were also typescripts of the letters and these Nowell-Smith sent to me. It was just as well I hadn't wasted several weeks in Washington turning pages of those folio scrapbooks. It also proved that a library may have an individual's papers and still not have everything. James's letters had been held out from the Marble archive.

INTERVIEWER

Were any interesting?

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EDEL

Just two, as far as I was concerned. A good letter about Shakespeare, in which James asserts Bacon didn't have enough poetry in him to have written the plays and sonnets; and another letter admitting he had written a review of *Drum Taps*, attacking Whitman when the volume came out, but adding that nothing would induce him to reveal "the whereabouts of my disgrace." The whereabouts were given in the bibliography I compiled with my collaborator, Dan H. Laurence.

INTERVIEWER

You mentioned the social notes to Marble. Don't social notes reveal little things too?

EDEL

Sometimes—dates, names, occasions. It's always difficult to recover details of social events and by and large they remain unrecorded. The great hostesses often don't write their memoirs. Also, social notes often are deceptive. One never knows, when James declines an invitation, whether or not he's indulging in the white lies of social duplicity.

INTERVIEWER

You also cite the importance of laundry lists, unpaid bills, and check stubs—things that might reveal clues to the personality of the subject.

EDEL

One never knows what these things may reveal. Eliot said, if we found Shakespeare's laundry lists, we might very well know something more about Shakespeare. We *might* know whether he was a man who was scrupulously clean, or whether he was a slob. We might. All these things tell us something. With James, for instance, it's the handwriting. He used to sign himself, Henry James, Jr. And after a while, the "Junior" got to be less and less. He hated being a junior, he hated number two. Papa was number one. There are a lot of juniors like that,

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who try to get around it some way, with numbers for instance: Vanderbilt I, Vanderbilt II, Vanderbilt III, etc. What's interesting is the way that the "Junior" in James's signature becomes, finally, just a little curve, a tiny curve with a dot over it. And in a matter of days after his father dies, he writes a letter to his publisher and draws a hand pointing to his signature—it's "Henry James," without the junior—saying, "this is the way I sign my name now." That's graphics. He didn't like being number two, he didn't like being number two to William either. I always look at things like that. There was one old notebook where James scrawled his expense accounts . . . that told me something. I haven't found any of James' checks, though I found checks written to him, which told me how much he was getting paid for his stories. Of course, I was very interested in that. An earlier biographer suddenly had the idea to look up the account books of magazines and sure enough, he found payments made to James for work he had done which, when it came out originally in the magazine, was unsigned. There are something like three hundred items of James's writing that were identified merely through the bookkeeping of some of these magazines. His early review of Whitman was found that way. Those fugitive writings can tell us so much.

INTERVIEWER

Fugitive writings?

EDEL

The odd little things that writers toss off spontaneously, which sometimes don't even get recorded in their bibliographies. Biographers search for them, if you can get any clues to them. There's another case of discovering one of James's great letters, of which I found a mention in a literary journal. Sometimes, you just look through the journals of the time that you knew the writer was involved with in some way. In one journal I found a little item that said, "Mr. James had advice for would-be novelists at the Deerfield Summer School." It quoted one sentence from the letter. So I thought, perhaps a fuller version of the letter is quoted somewhere else. Following that kind of

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reasoning—and this is the sort of "sleuthing" part of it—I did some straight thinking. I said, "Well, the first place to look is *The New York Tribune*." That was the most influential newspaper of the time. And I decided to look at the Sunday issues of that year starting in January through June. I went and looked, and sure enough, somewhere along the line there was James's letter to the Deerfield Summer School. The Summer School had written and asked him for the letter, and he had sent them back four paragraphs. That's a good example of the plain, hard, digging you do in biography—I came upon one fact, and just sat down and reasoned the rest out.

INTERVIEWER

So there's a great deal of speculation in biography.

EDEL

Inevitably. We can never know everything. We can't even be sure of the dates on letters, unless we have some verification. Letters often are misdated. What we hope for from most biographers is informed speculation. I usually set the facts in front of a reader and if necessary say "we may speculate" or "we may conjecture," if I think the facts add up to this or that conclusion. There are gratifying moments when you speculate and then find proof of accuracy; there are less gratifying moments when you find your conclusion was far-fetched.

INTERVIEWER

You play a hunch?

EDEL

It isn't quite a hunch. It's often a subliminal bit of computer-work in your mind. I once asked myself why James had called his collected novels and tales "The New York Edition." This struck me as curious. The edition was being published in New York and in London. But he didn't call the one in London "The London Edition." He called it "New York" there as well. The logical answer seemed that he was somehow relating his collected works to the city of his birth. When I was given access

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to the Scribner archive—they published the edition—I found a very Jamesian memorandum which confirmed my hypothesis. "If a name be wanted for the edition, for convenience and distinction, I should particularly like to call it the 'New York Edition.' My feeling about the matter is that it refers the whole enterprise explicitly to my native city—to which I have had no great opportunity of rendering that sort of homage." And I have already described how my original thesis, that James's playwriting years consciously made him reconsider his novelistic techniques, was validated in James's notebooks.

INTERVIEWER

To get to the point where you can use supposition effectively, you must have to know your subject very well.

EDEL

A biographer gets to know a subject better than the subject ever knew himself or herself, because the biographer has read everything. Can you furnish a list of all your correspondents? All the writings you did long ago? And yet a lot probably are lurking in some trunk or attic. A couple of years ago a high school friend of mine died and his widow sent me all the letters I had written him when I was fourteen and fifteen, he having been then in England. It was astonishing how much of my lost young life I recovered in these letters, how much I saw of my young and rather priggish self! All I remembered was that we had exchanged a few letters when he was staying in Birmingham and I was on the prairie. I had written more than a hundred letters. T. S. Eliot once asked me about all the letters James had written, and I remember he made a gesture to his wife that *his* letters would fill a book—and he held up two fingers to show a very thin book. Now the widow is going to publish his letters; she has found trunksful. There will be, I am sure, several very fat volumes. After a while I got to be pretty expert in appraising James's correspondence. I once called on a woman in England who had an important batch, and told her I figured there might be eighty or ninety. She counted them out to me as if she were shuffling a pack of cards. There were eighty-nine.

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The length and nature of the friendship, the general size of such batches, enabled me to hazard a guess. I remember once urging Harvard to get Morton Fullerton's letters because I thought them important. When they got them, I read them with a sense of disappointment. There were eighty or so and they told me very little. This was like the Manton Marble story. I was sure there must be others. And in due course I found the really important batch at Princeton. Fullerton had given his best letters to his sister or cousin, and she passed them on to Princeton. And then later, one or two other good ones turned up in auctions. You see, biographers have to be like dogs, always following a scent.

INTERVIEWER

Were there other kinds of material beside correspondence?

EDEL

James discovered the telegram at the turn of the century. That got to be a sport. I've seen long Proust telegrams, as long as letters. But James's are brief and he's having fun. "Deprecate attendance at station. Opulent choice of cabs."

INTERVIEWER

You are currently editing Edmund Wilson's papers. A major difference between your work on James and your work on Wilson is that you knew Wilson, knew him well. Are you running into the same problems of accuracy and discretion that you did with James?

EDEL

I am not writing Wilson's life; the problems are different. I am editing Wilson's journals, diaries, and notes. With Wilson's papers, even so, I have to verify as much as I can, because people forget, they make mistakes . . . I've come now to the part where he and I know each other, and he often misquotes me. Or, I'll tell him some little biographical fact that I've learned, I'll mention a name, and he gets the name wrong. So that makes me very careful about what he said to other people. And then, where

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the people are still alive, I write to them and try to check and make sure—I don't want to get involved in any libel suits!

INTERVIEWER

In addition to the nature of the work being different, there is also the difference between the two men.

EDEL

Fundamentally, Wilson and James belonged to different eras and had distinctly different minds and temperaments. They can't really be compared, except that both had fine minds, and both tended to be aloof in spite of their gregariousness. James had a transfiguring imagination; Wilson was concerned with concretions. A daffodil was, to Wilson, a daffodil, and he could describe it charmingly. To James it was a yellow essence, a distinct form and shape, an embodiment of shade and color, texture and sunlight. James abstracted reality into new realities and generalities. Wilson interrogated, assembled, dissected. James was the novelist par excellence; Wilson struggled to write the two or three novels he produced, and they are by no means his best writing. So with sex—allowing for the difference between the Victorian-Edwardian James, and the modern Wilson. Wilson dealt with sex in all its physicality. He was direct, confronting, copulative. James translated sex into spirituality, into varied forms of reticence and avoidance. It assumed highly nuanced forms; it was all indirect. James would have called Wilson a literalist. Wilson could not quite get into Jamesian depths—the novelist was too subjective for him and Wilson had the same difficulties with him that he had with Kafka.

INTERVIEWER

Wilson had, well, quite a busy sex life, as you've just alluded to. Is that presenting a problem for you?

EDEL

There are whole sections in Wilson' journals in which he is very candid about his sex life. You couldn't have published that in the twenties. Now I've been doing it, though there are parts

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I've had to omit because the people don't want to appear, and I have to respect their wishes.

INTERVIEWER

Even if it's at the expense of telling the whole story?

EDEL

That's right. I can't. When the people are still alive, they're entitled to their privacy. Fortunately, by the time he was old, a great many of his sexual partners were old ladies and I don't think that I've been indiscreet . . . but in one or two cases, I did get indignant letters, where the ladies suddenly recognized themselves in an early volume, even though their names were disguised. They were very unhappy about it, but at least they weren't litigious. One has to take the attitude that later biographers, of later generations, will rectify and deal with that. It's up to them. I can only do what I can do now. I have to go by the present situation.

INTERVIEWER

That must be frustrating.

EDEL

Sometimes it can be. What was frustrating was to find Mary McCarthy giving her papers to Vassar recently, and some of her quarrels with Wilson appearing in the press, whereas I had avoided using such details in the last volume. I can understand her reason for withholding the papers until now. She could feel that her privacy was being invaded. And I think that's quite right, quite fair. Biographers and editors have to practice a certain ethic in this kind of work. They're dealing with human situations and human lives, and if the people are still living one cannot ride roughshod over them. That's why I was very careful not to offend the Jameses, although they gave me complete freedom. And as I say, I tell the story, but I always try to tell it very cautiously and not give them too much mental anguish. Sometimes, you can cause a lot of mental anguish. Anyway, I suppose *now* I could restore some of the McCarthy material. Do a retrospective or a flashback or something—if I were writing Wilson's life.

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INTERVIEWER

You've said many biographies need to be rewritten. Why?

EDEL

Like humans, biographies grow old. New generations need new versions of past history in the generation's new language. In the past thirty years our attitudes toward sex—toward the physical being of men and women—have changed drastically, and most biographies were written before these changes occurred. We have had the new feminism. And we have also the "new biography."

INTERVIEWER

By which you mean—

EDEL

New ways of writing lives, new approaches. During the past fifty years there has been a remarkable revolution in psychology and our understanding of human behavior. That doesn't mean that every biography needs to be rewritten. There are memoirs, and brief lives of many persons, which serve the general need. But every now and again a new generation will want to take a new look at FDR, or Napoleon, or Churchill. Also new material keeps turning up. Look at the Mary McCarthy example. An older generation often sits on a good many secrets which come to light as the generation dies off. The rewriting of biographies is a natural process and follows the curve of a new generation's curiosity and the continuing work of historians. What I did to Thoreau is a good example.

INTERVIEWER

What did you do?

EDEL

I was asked to write a fifty-page pamphlet on Thoreau. I did a lot of reading, and rereading. I came to him quite freshly. The biographers had been using their received image of him for a long time. He had become very popular in the 1960s. He was at the center of two myths: one was that he had built his

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hut in the wilderness and escaped from the tyrannies of civilization. The other was that he went to jail to defy a form of taxation and so stood up for civil disobedience. Both myths had in them not the truths of what Thoreau did, but the wishes of most Americans at the time. When I had looked afresh at all the data, it was clear Thoreau had not moved into the wilderness. He moved one mile from his home into the woods at Walden Pond, within walking distance of the life he had always led. So it was a gesture. And his civil disobedience had been considerably rewritten, as it were, by Gandhi, and it had worked for Gandhi. I wasn't trying to debunk the magic of Thoreau's myths, but I saw that Thoreau himself wasn't at all the Thoreau of legend which biographers and folklore had built up. The biographers had all told the story of how Thoreau, in a dry season, fried some fish in a tree trunk and set fire to the Concord woods. What I saw was that he had come to be hated by the townspeople, that he was a meditative narcissist with more feeling for trees and plants than for humans. I had asked myself the question: Why did he *really* at that moment of his life move a mile down the way to the edge of the pond? The answer was because he had become very unpopular in the town.

INTERVIEWER

How did you arrive at your conclusions?

EDEL

I arrived at my conclusions—they have been picked up since by others—by reading the psychological signs and signals of Thoreau's personality and his actions.

INTERVIEWER

How can you be sure you read the signs correctly? What is the psychological evidence?

EDEL

The ways in which we act; the things we say whose meanings we can read today, though earlier generations did not have the

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perception of them. The Freudian slip which tells what people really are thinking. The aggressive practical joker, the funny man who is really depressed, the suicide who jumps rather than swallows pills—these are all, as we now know, signatures of the self. All these details need to be observed and pondered. That's what I mean by reexamining our materials and our conceptions. Of course you can't prove all your inductions, but in lives we have repetitious patterns. Joyce repeated his myths about himself again and again—and everyone thought what he did brilliant and funny; but a new and careful look shows them to have been pathetic and pathological. He constantly proclaimed himself a victim of persecution, even after the world honored him and worshipped him. T.S. Eliot's stance, his structured prose, the very subjects he chose for his essays, tell us much about him. His essay on "Tradition and the Individual Talent," behind its great show of impersonality, is a most personal essay about his stuffy family and his impatience with his own stuffiness, his striving to break away into "the new," as Ezra Pound had urged him. He's very much involved with being a sort of "Prince Hamlet."

INTERVIEWER

You've been known to use the term "literary psychology."

EDEL

A doctor defines a patient's illness in part by looking at symptoms. A biographer (who is by no means a doctor and certainly not a therapist) defines the subject's nature by looking at what the mind brings to the surface and transforms into language. What I like to call "literary psychology" is the only kind of psychology a biographer can practice, for there's no question of putting his subject on the couch—as critics of biography and the psychological approach claim. A biographer is merely someone looking at evidence—circumstantial, psychological, documentary. We must remember that human beings are psychological entities as well as physical; and that above all, in biography, we are watching their imagination of themselves.

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INTERVIEWER

You've been both admired and criticized for your use of psychology in biography.

EDEL

Well, there are the convinced and the unconvinced. Biographers who have felt shortcomings in their own works, when they saw what I had done and what I demonstrated, faulted me. But most of my readers reacted quite differently. You must remember there's still a great resistance to certain simple truths about the human animal. Everything points to our being creatures of habit and "conditioning"—but there are still some who give us absolute free will and laugh at this kind of determinism. Academe hates what it calls "psychologizing," because they fear it. And then there's been a great deal of half-baked psychologizing.

INTERVIEWER

Let's talk about determinism.

EDEL

Shakespeare's great line about determinism is in Hamlet—the special providence that exists in the fall of a sparrow. Our lives are determined, if you want to take the religious view, by God—but God gave us parents, or surrogate parents, and their behavior forms us in childhood; a loved baby behaves differently from a neglected baby. Our entire sensory apparatus goes into play the moment light and air and sound—the entire world—assail us as we emerge from the womb. All this is in the textbooks, and yet most people dismiss it. Our bodies and our psyche take their shape from the way in which all of us have been fashioned. There are phases and stages of our bodily as well as our mental education. The habits we form, the clothes we wear, the furniture we put into rooms all are in one way or another signatures of ourselves. A great part of biography is the study of these signatures. Biography has for too long studied the artificial trappings, the clichés of lives. Everything has in reality been determined, including the ways in which

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we cope with the determinings, and the ways in which we defend ourselves. A biographer tries to figure out, if he follows this path, how the subject feels—or fails to observe, or shuts out feeling—the fundamental things of humanity and human behavior. The inhibited person will act predictably different from the unbuttoned person.

INTERVIEWER

Isn't there a danger of overpsychologizing in biography?

EDEL

A biographer mustn't overdo anything. Readers need evidence in reading a biography and the biographer needn't underline to excess. Let me give an example. In James's early stories, I found a few which deal with the ways in which marriage proves fatal to one or the other party. In "Longstaff's Marriage," for example, a man is ill and wants to marry a young woman on his deathbed. She refuses. He recovers. Then later she is dying, and he marries her, and *she* dies. Isn't that a strange fantasy? There are other stories like this one, and there is James's favorite story by Mérimée, about the young man who puts his engagement ring on a statue of Venus's finger and she comes to his bed to claim him in marriage—and crushes him to death. You will recognize that when I found in James's notebooks his playing with names, as he often did, the rhymes Ledward, then Bedward, then Dedward—and then as if for emphasis Deadward—I saw his association of these names as defining the stories he had been writing. My conclusion was "To be led to the marriage bed was to be dead. James accordingly chose the path of safety. He remained celibate." All this did embody his geniune fear of women—and he wrote a number of vampire stories. The stories, the rhymes, James's attitude toward marriage, his entire psychosexual makeup, about which I offered a long chain of evidence, warranted my reaching this conclusion and making this remark. But you should have heard the howl biographers and critics let out when I first launched my hypothesis. A short story written by an author is fabricated in every detail in the mind of that author. It is fiction, but all

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the fictional elements have been thought, conceived, worked and reworked in the fancy of the writer. They are daydream stuff—and they tell us a great deal. What we need is validating evidence. I don't think I was overpsychologizing.

INTERVIEWER

What was your own background in psychology?

EDEL

My wanting to write about the "stream of consciousness" when I was eighteen will suggest to you that I was interested in the inner workings of the mind, in free association. I was indeed at that time excited by Joyce's attempting to set down not only the intellectual thoughts but the perceptual world, and I found Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, his giving us the mentally retarded Benjy's sensory perceptions, a veritable revelation. I have told in *Stuff of Sleep and Dreams* of my meeting with Alfred Adler in Vienna. I also read a great deal in William James and I first read Freud in French translation in the late 1920s. But reading is not always feeling; we get only an intellectual conception of psychology. It wasn't until I came out of the army in 1946, at forty, that I found myself in such a state of confusion and despair that I went to an analyst. During the three years of this analysis I underwent an entirely new education—insight into the nature of my dreams and fantasies. I was mentally attracted to the entire process—the analysis wasn't just therapy, it became for me an entire schooling—and as I began to read more widely and talk with therapists, I was struck by the misapplication of therapeutic concepts to literature. Van Wyck Brooks and Edmund Wilson had both undergone therapy and used it—Wilson more successfully than Van Wyck Brooks. I went on to ask myself what in Freud, Jung, Erik Erikson, and the others *belonged* to literary study and what belonged to the realm of helping people in their problems. When I started using what I had learned—and I kept up my discussions and readings—I recognized that the only part of psychoanalytic psychology that belonged to literature was what Freud had discovered about the human capacity for imagining, dreaming, ex-

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periencing, observing, our tendency to delude ourselves, our rationalizations, our need for pleasure, our defense against pain—these human things belong to literature. Talking about "oral" and "anal," using the adjective Oedipal, and all the other lingo of the analysts, has nothing to do with us—these are theoretical constructs. The first paper I wrote after my exposure to analysis was an appeal to fellow biographers to translate the technical language into human language. Do you know that in all my five volumes of the Henry James I do not once speak of "sibling rivalry," though I describe the rivalries between the brothers? What people have called my "Freudianism" isn't that at all. I do not apply "constructs" to my material. I look at my material and deal with what it contains from the psychological orientation I have described. But this can't be explained to one who hasn't been through the excitement or anguish of seeing dream symbols as part of one's experience of feeling and life; intellectual discussion of emotion doesn't convey the actual *lived* feeling of emotion. An individual who hasn't been in the depths of depression has no conception of what being depressed means.

INTERVIEWER

You've frequently talked about the biographer discovering the "life myth" of the subject. What do you mean by that?

EDEL

The inner, unconscious and invisible drive in an individual, what we popularly call the "life-style," is in reality a coalition of fancies springing from what the individual would like to be. Hemingway is an easy illustration because his myth is so obvious. Every minute of the day, in all that he did, he was trying to prove himself—how he was a fighter, a slayer of animals, a "slayer" of women sexually. He had to fight battles, to get into wars. Something drove him: big animals, the biggest fish, and he had to be "the greatest," the supreme writer. And he himself didn't understand this; he merely asserted himself in this way. Something teased his mind and created his directed physical energy. The self-myth is a covert myth, and Hemingway had to go on living it even after he had succeeded far beyond

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the expectations of most writers. The myth of "achievers" offers one key to unlock the inner individual. Thoreau revealed his life myth in what he must have thought a pretty little fable—but what a sad fable it is! He talked about having lost a hound, a bay horse and a turtle dove and sometimes he heard them in the distance, but he could never find them. Thus his fancy told a truth he himself didn't begin to understand. He was describing longing and need. He named the three elements missing in his life: the faithfulness of the dog, that is affection; the strength and virility of the horse, in other words his sexuality; and the dove, the symbol of peace and the Holy Ghost that is love. Without guides (aptly selected from the animal kingdom) Thoreau kept looking in nature for the things absent in his psyche, and with an aggressivity that undermined the sweetness of his life. A man who decides to be, or finds himself to be, a loner must accept the consequences of that decision. Thoreau's life is a tragic life, that of a man of enormous feelings that have shriveled up within him.

INTERVIEWER

What about Henry James's personal myth?

EDEL

James wore an extraordinary mask. He presented himself and thought himself the quietest of men, all meekness and acceptance and resignation. He wrote and read and talked for fifty years; it was a sedentary writer's life with some social life on the side, during which he displayed much wit and charm. From the beginning, he announced he would not marry. He lived by himself, but in one respect he met the world grandly—he gave of his work in abundance; that abundance in itself was a part of his hidden drive to power. His novels are about power, not love. He gives an impression of involvement in personal relations, but he is distant and cool, and seems to possess the kind of wisdom in which an individual never flounders; he knows where he is going. He needed money and success. He earned enough to live decently and stylishly. Society accepted him. He tried for years—he was tenacious—to earn theatrical success,

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and failed. This was a man who wanted and achieved greatness. His planning of *The Portrait of a Lady* as a literary coup is very much like Flaubert's planning of *Madame Bovary* (who wasn't a lady). By his tenacity, James brought it off—and made himself a literary power even when he had a limited audience. He became an oracle, a "Master" as the young called him. The myth of his drive to power was revealed in his deathbed dictation when in his delirium he dictated letters signed "Napoleon." The military Napoleon would not accept the word "impossible." James wouldn't either. Nothing was impossible to a man of imagination, he maintained. He believed in *gloire* in the exalted French sense of the word. As Napoleon annexed territories by waging wars, James annexed, in his imagination, the whole of Europe to the American novel. He created the "international" novel—he foresaw the drama of America's encounter with Europe which today we watch in every foreign policy debate, and he saw too the dangers of America's ignorance of the rest of the world. What he could not have dreamed is the way in which we have been great colonizers of the American dream and Coca Cola. James became a theorist of fiction, a lawgiver. Thus some individuals act out their covert dreams and the world accepts these as it accepted Hemingway and James; Hemingway the writer for the masses, James the artist for a distinct and profound civilized minority—Matthew Arnold's "saving remnant," which cannot, I'm afraid, stay the rising tide of barbarism.

INTERVIEWER

You've just talked about James's deathbed dictation. Is it true that he said something like "Ah, here it is, that distinguished thing!" when he was dying?

EDEL

I'm not sure he said it but it's beautiful bit of apocrypha. It sounds like something Max Beerbohm might have put into James's mouth. But what you're thinking of originated in Edith Wharton's memoirs. She says that when James had his first stroke, at the beginning of the last illness, he heard a voice—distinctly not his own—saying, "So here it is at last, the distinguished

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thing!" Mrs. Wharton got it from James's old friend Lady Prothero. But the flat-footed facts of biography tell us James woke up and felt ill. He got out of bed to call his valet, Burgess; in reaching for the bell-button he grabbed the cord to his bed-lamp. He shouted as he crashed to the floor and help came. That doesn't preclude his hearing the voice; and he may have later polished the story a bit if he was able to tell it; subsequent strokes quickly clouded his mind. We do know he asked for a thesaurus to find a better word for "paralytic."

INTERVIEWER

In what way will biography be changed in the future?

EDEL

We can foresee great changes as a result of the sexual revolution. The biographer now can write with greater openness. Homosexuality was totally underground; today we at least face it. The Victorians so often suppressed the idea that men and women were physical—that is, sexual—entities. The problem will be how and where the lines will be drawn between privacy and the unbuttoned self. The exhibitionists will be out in force, and the voyeurs. New codes will be advanced—but the cry will be to "tell it all," and biography will probably move closer to pornography. But freer discussion and consideration of humans as psychosexual beings is a great gain for the biographical art and for truth.

INTERVIEWER

Do you yourself think James was homosexual?

EDEL

Somehow, homosexuality in James's mode of life seems out of character. He was too fastidious, too afraid of sex altogether—and contented himself by being publicly affectionate, giving his friends great hugs and pats on the back. That was why I use the term homoerotic. He had more erotic feelings towards men than women; we have a great deal of evidence in his work and in his late letters to younger men. But there was some-

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thing avuncular about this. Somerset Maugham's story that Hugh Walpole once offered himself to James and James said, "I can't, I can't, I can't," rings true, and I was told by Stephen Spender once that Walpole himself confirmed this. What I did find was that James, who in seventeen out of his twenty novels couldn't write about love (he always turned it into power), in his last three finest and most powerful novels wrote believably about love, especially in *The Golden Bowl.* This suggests that once he had reached old age, and the time of diminished passions, he could open himself to feel love in ways that he had not been able to feel when he was channeling all his emotions into his inexorable power-drive. Some such hypothesis seems to me valid.

INTERVIEWER

James had a lot of female friends.

EDEL

As homoerotic men do. But they were elderly ladies, mostly mother figures. They were his best friends, when London society opened its arms to him: one was eighty, one was eighty-five. They were a marvelous mine of information about the society of the past. The actress Fanny Kemble—he'd visit her once a week, he was loyal to her. She was in her late seventies, early eighties. And the young girls . . . he loved young women, after all. And he wrote *Portrait of a Lady*. He understood them, but then, he was totally identifying with them. He was a young lady in so many ways. A Victorian lady. Somewhere inside him, there was an adolescent girl. And he understood adolescents very well.

INTERVIEWER

I'd like to ask you about the recent tendency to dismiss all biography as fiction.

EDEL

Biography cannot be fiction. I have said a novelist is free to do anything—the novel is as much a work of the imagination

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as the writer wants to make of it. The novelist creates the characters, supplies their background. Turgenev used to give each character a lengthy dossier as if the person had a police record. The biographer doesn't have that freedom. The characters are real. The dossiers have to be real. Lytton Strachey once gave Queen Elizabeth a jewel to wear at a great occasion, but when asked, he admitted he put the jewel there to add a touch to his picture. That was a piece of fictional "property" imported into the story. George Kennan once admitted that in one of his histories he put a goat into the landscape between Russia and Finland when he was describing the departure of some important diplomat or personage from Russia to Finland. This was historic license. But he did add that he had usually seen goats in that landscape even though he didn't know whether there was one there on that particular day. These of course are small details but they define the difference between fiction and history. Truman Capote, to get around this, wrote an account of real criminals and real murders but called it "a non-fiction fiction." That was his way of explaining he had done some fictionalizing. Norman Mailer calls his *Executioner's Song* a novel, not a biography. There are biographies that have imitated fiction, and there are fictions that have imitated biography—Woolf's *Orlando* for example, which contains real-life materials about Vita Sackville-West. *David Copperfield* and *Tristram Shandy* also pretend to be biographies.

INTERVIEWER

Did you ever imitate the techniques of fiction?

EDEL

Yes, I did it twice in the James life. I created a small scene for which I found all the data, or a lot of it, in his autobiography, where he describes his call on his ailing cousin Minny Temple, in New Rochelle, before leaving on his tour of Europe—his first independent tour. There are two or three vivid sentences and I used them as if the scene were taking place; I dramatized the material. But every item came from the

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novelist—how Minny looked, what she said, what he replied. The other details were in the letters they wrote subsequently to one another. It was the last time he saw her; she died before he returned. My second imitation was when I found a sentence from James to a friend saying he had that morning visited Millbank prison to get material for a scene in a novel he was about to write. The visit to the prison is quite minutely described in the novel. I made a pastiche and had James actively mounting steps (as he described) and going through clanging doors, and seeing the prisoners. James reported the sounds, the smells, all that his senses had absorbed. His travel writings had demonstrated to me how accurate his descriptions could be. I could have quoted this stuff, but it was more dramatic to have James actively gathering his material. This is part of the shaping and telling in biography. Not a single fact has been imagined. Only my narrative form.

INTERVIEWER

So the moment comes when you must start writing. You've gathered all your material. Where do you begin?

EDEL

You begin, I suppose, the way all story-tellers begin. Remember, a biography is a narrative, and the biographer has a story to tell. Inside the mind there is the classical beginning: "Once upon a time . . ." In my Thoreau, I found my first sentence an expression of my thematic sense of Thoreau's narcissism. I began something like this: "Of the creative spirits that flourished in Concord, Massachusetts, it might be said that Hawthorne loved men but felt estranged from them, Emerson loved ideas even more than men, and Thoreau loved himself." A cruel beginning, but I think the reader wants to go right on. In the James, I began, well, *at* the beginning, with the coming of the first Jameses to America. I had made two decisions before I started writing: one was to enunciate all my themes in a kind of prologue called "Interrogation of the Past," the second was that I had so much material I'd bog down if I didn't find a selective principle. I determined to find a series of character-

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istic episodes in the lives of the Jameses, almost as if I were doing a scenario, and the biography would consist of the ways in which I strung the episodes together. As I wrote one episode, the next took its shape. Usually when I found a title, I had the essence of my given episode. I moved chronologically but also I had to juggle events in sequence, and events which occurred simultaneously and needed arranging in some sort of cogent order. The questions in writing I paid most attention to were those of narrative interest, drama where possible, and *pacing*. No one knows how to write biography if they can't pace the story. Too many biographies are jerky bundles of indigestible fact.

INTERVIEWER

As you went on with your twenty-year project, surely your relationship to James must have changed?

EDEL

My relationship with James became increasingly business-like. I sometimes wished I could ask him questions, but in his absence I played the biographer's game of putting the question to myself and then writing down all the possible answers. Sometimes you succeed; sometimes you overlook the most obvious possibilities. My psychological studies helped me out of the "transference," I think, when I found myself saying, "Here is that strange queer talkative man, a wanderer in London . . ." and when I recognized what an *ego* he had! Most biographers blindly overlook their involvement and simply report facts and believe themselves to know the answers to all unanswered questions.

INTERVIEWER

Did you ever feel like arguing with James?

EDEL

Not often. I did like his balanced view of life, his calm, his general "cool" compared to my own impulsive way of approaching life. But I think I can best answer your question by

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telling you the one dream I had about him. I never dreamed about him when I was working on the biography. But when I had finished, I one day dreamed I was a journalist again and with a group of journalists at Lamb House, his country house in Sussex. I remember that in the dream I was worried what he might think about all I had written about him. I hung back, and when the rest of the press went away I walked into his study. He was sitting behind his desk. I sat down and said, "Mr. James, I must tell you, I've had great difficulties establishing the hierarchies of your friendships." He looked sadly at me and replied, "You know, I never got them sorted out myself." I think what I did in that dream was to give myself James's blessing. The dream also enunciated a biographical truth. The subject of a biography has never had a chance to bring order to a life so constantly lived and involved in action. It is the biographer who finds the frame, sorts things out, and for better or worse tries to bring order into a life story—create a sense of sequence and coherence.

INTERVIEWER

Do you ever feel "possessive" of James now, as though he is your subject?

EDEL

Certainly not. I never did. But I was criticized and often bitterly attacked for defending my priorities. Academics are great raiders; they love to pounce on other people's work and grab a letter and rush off and publish it. The point which they always overlooked was that I was committed to a long-range project, I had devoted years to it and it had cost me a great deal. In simple business terms, I wasn't going to tolerate trespassers. There were plenty of other subjects in the world open to them; the old frontier spirit of my childhood asserted itself. I had established my territory. I didn't see why I shouldn't exercise my rights. There were times when the academics were like a bunch of little nibbling mice and if one allows them to nibble away, your work is endangered, the best gets eaten up. I wanted my books to take the public by surprise, to have novelty and

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freshness. There were, along the way, certain professional invaders as well and I had to use whatever resources, not least the law, to protect myself. There were also plagiarists who borrowed my structure and order and development of the story, and often my quotes, arguing that they had seen the same material—but you see, what they didn't know was that for every letter I used there were perhaps a hundred others of the same sort I could have used. It was too much of a coincidence that they should choose the selfsame letters and the exact quotes, and the order I imposed on this vast material. There have been famous lawsuits about this kind of thing, and the courts have upheld the originality of the created work, the originality of a design.

INTERVEIWER

Let's talk about the gender of a biographer and that of the subject. Does it have an effect on the work?

EDEL

If you mean women can only write about women and men about men, that's nonsense. Henry James wrote *Portrait of a Lady* and I believe portrayed his lady better than most women writers would have done. You might get a biography written by a woman-hater, and I have seen some biographies of feminists which were a bit biased in dealing with men. The male biographers of famous women have usually had their love affair with these women in their "transference," and what you get then might be the usual intersexual bluntings, obfuscations, fantasies. We all have male and female components, and I am inclined to believe that the problems I have discussed exist on either side of the sexual line. You can have homoerotic loves in biography and also lesbian loves. And the results have to be judged by the completed book.

INTERVIEWER

You spoke of using the tape recorder. How did biographers ever do interviews before the invention of the tape recorder? How did Boswell interview Johnson?

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EDEL

We know that Boswell kept regular minutes, written retrospectively, of his talks with Johnson. In my time, I did the same; sometimes just brief jottings. A biographer, like a reporter, has to judge whether pulling out a notebook will frighten the interviewed person, or inhibit, or render the subject expansive. My own theory was that a notebook interfered; I suspect tape recorders today interfere. I simply engaged in conversation and wrote notes afterwards. I'm sure that in my talks with Edith Wharton, we would have had a much more formal relation if I had ever pulled out my pencil, let alone a notebook. Ask me today what Edith Wharton was wearing the first time I met her in 1930, and I think I could tell you.

INTERVIEWER

Say, what was Edith Wharton wearing when you first met her?

EDEL

The image I got, as she stood on the walk where the car drew up, was of a short dumpy woman, very expensively dressed. She wore an off-the-face hat, of the kind that was stylish in the twenties. I was too young to observe detail, but I seem to recall a mauve suit of very fine weave and a mauve or lavender blouse. What stayed with me above all was that I was looking (after I had met her eyes and her welcoming smile) at the Legion of Honor *bouton* carefully pinned to the blouse, resting below a fine piece of jewelry. (I was dressed in an ill-fitting suit, had a wisp of a mustache, and wore a beret.) On a later occasion I remember her wearing the same sort of outfit for a walk in the garden and then saying she would use up one of the two times she was allowed, by her doctors, to climb the stairs daily, to put on a fresh "frock" for lunch. It was a lovely frock, as I remember, gold and black I think—but I don't trust my memory on colors. The *merlan frite* and the Montrachet, however, were delicious.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think about the biographical value of "oral"

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biographies, like Jean Stein and George Plimpton's *Edie* about Edie Sedgwick, or Peter Manso's *Mailer*, in which snippets of numerous people's accounts are woven together, like an oral mosaic?

EDEL

I haven't read these, but I've seen others, like Michael Ondaatje's book about New Orleans jazz. They are like film documentaries or collages. They are distinctly cinematic and vivid, but the evaluating eye of the biographer, screening the testimony, is absent. You take the story for granted, as you do a film. They are built on the theory that pictures don't lie, which isn't always true, and that a visual is worth a thousand words, which I deny—words can do many things pictures can't. A picture hits an emotion; words explain and offer nuances and delicate overtones in addition.

INTERVIEWER

You've just cut your James down from five volumes into one.

EDEL

Yes, I'm happy to have done that. It gives me, at my age, a sense of completion. The cutting was done by my editor, Catharine Carver, and it was splendid. Then I sewed up some of the truncations, and grafted in new material, and wrote some new chapters, and I think it is now a fresh and independent work, a reworked biography, for our new time. All biographies *can* be put into a single volume, but the many-volumed serialization exists because of the richness and abundance of material; it provides more backgrounds, and then there is a different kind of pacing. But sometimes the big fat ones exist only because the biographer didn't bother to summarize, didn't know what to put in and what to throw out. I used to say that if I had done that, I would have ended up with twenty-five volumes. And then there is the question of exploring our greatest literary genius.

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INTERVIEWER

Do you think that of James?

EDEL

I'm not the one who first made that claim. R. P. Blackmur called him the Shakespeare of the American novel. And I noticed that recently Joseph Epstein ranked him with the great names of British literary history—with Milton and Dryden, and the great line of prose writers. Certainly he was our greatest literary imagination; and the way in which he is constantly quoted and referred to suggests that his dream of *gloire* has been confirmed by time. But many Americans are put off by him.

INTERVIEWER

Why?

EDEL

Because he had so many phases—because his style grew intricate. Because he was often critical of America. Because he was wholly committed to art. Because, they say, "why can't he say it out plain"—as his brother William always demanded. I think his late style has floored many.

INTERVIEWER

What was the reason for his late style, how did it evolve?

EDEL

He began dictating directly to the typewriter. It's a case of the medium being the message and with dictation he ran into longer sentences, and parenthetical remarks, and when he revised what he had dictated he tended to add further flourishes. In the old days when he wrote in longhand he was much briefer and crisper, but now he luxuriated in fine phrases and he was exquisitely baroque. It's a grand style but not to everyone's taste.

INTERVIEWER

And no one noticed a change in the style at the time?

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EDEL

His friends did, and some of the reviewers. And then people began to parody him. James Thurber, in our time, wrote wonderful parodies of his late manner; earlier, Beerbohm; and there were others. Parody demonstrates, I believe, the high individuality of a style. And one must distinguish between true style and a series of tics, like Hemingway's. I think you'll find James's late books can be read aloud, because they are written in a dictated style.

INTERVIEWER

What about you? Do you write in longhand or directly on the typewriter?

EDEL

I used to write always in longhand and then type. But now I write best on the typewriter, it gets my thoughts down faster. But I really mess around and can go from one to the other. My way of writing is hard to describe because I don't completely think through what I am going to put down—I just start and a lot of nonsense and bad writing comes out on the page. I keep on rewriting, in longhand or on the typewriter, until somehow out of my subliminal self there emerge all kinds of thoughts and ideas I hadn't known to be tucked away inside me. Then I edit myself drastically. At some point a final version appears. It's largely an unconscious process. My Bloomsbury book, which was an experiment in group biography that almost immediately (as a method) had an influence on other writers, came very quickly and easily, because I loved my subject, and the whole idea of the book. I have just rewritten the introduction to Wilson's *The Fifties* twenty times—and finally it has jelled.

INTERVIEW

Is it true you type with only two fingers?

EDEL

Yes. That's why I couldn't make my peace with a word processor. My wife gave me a lovely one for my seventy-fifth

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birthday, but I didn't like the machine's insolence. It tried to make me its slave. If I were seventeen or so, I would have had to master it, but I was too old. Yet my friend John Hersey swears by it, he thinks it's done wonders for him. But then, John's a little younger than I am. . . . I went back to cutting and pasting, sorting and retyping. I wear myself out typing too much: slumped shoulders, aching back, cramped fingers. Too many years of sloppy and untrained working of machinery; but long-hand now makes me impatient.

INTERVIEWER

What about the end of twenty years' work? When you finished the last of the James biography, did any sort of post-partum depression set in?

EDEL

I suppose a vague sort of separation anxiety, but also a sense of triumph. And then I had so many other projects—I was committed to the Bloomsbury book, four volumes of James's letters, the five volumes of the Wilson journals. I couldn't tell you how many books I've seen through the press in the last ten years—but about one or two a year. Last year I had the final volume of James's letters, and my book *Writing Lives*. This year I have the one-volume James and the fourth Wilson. For next year, I am to revise my volume of the James plays, and am editing in collaboration James's complete notebooks, as well as doing the last of the Wilson volumes, and also a one-volume edition of selected James letters. And I like to keep up book reviewing, a few reviews a year.

INTERVIEWER

You've been doing a lot of work on writers in old age.

EDEL

I have watched myself aging, and in line with my theory that the greatest enemy of writers is depression, which they can't avoid, I have studied in detail the old age of writers to see how they handled themselves. My essay "Portrait of the Artist as

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an Old Man" is widely known, and this year I published "The Artist in Old Age." The first dealt with Yeats, James, and Tolstoy; the second with Willa Cather, Edmund Wilson, and William Carlos Williams.

INTERVIEWER

What, if I may ask, is the answer to old age?

EDEL

The answer to old age is to keep one's mind busy and to go on with one's life as if it were interminable. I always admired Chekhov for building a new house when he was dying of tuberculosis.

INTERVIEWER

Aren't you currently working on your memoirs?

EDEL

Yes, but I have not yet found a form for these. I don't want to do a formal autobiography, or a confessional book. I am going to select certain specific areas of memory. All my writings have been a search for form, really experiments in form. Critics will someday see this in the James—it's the last thing they look for nowadays. I gave a form to the life of Willa Cather, which I finished after my friend E. K. Brown died in the fifties and left three or four chapters unwritten. My Thoreau was an experiment in condensation and reinterpretation. Bloomsbury was a stringing of different lives together as one strings beads. My memoirs will deal with my prairie years, but I don't intend to dwell on seventeen years of journalism. The war will be the center. And then the James project. With, of course, all the personalities I met in my various lives. One learns always from the past. I studied Boswell to understand modern biography; now I am studying Gibbon's memoirs—which though fragmentary have some important lessons. I'd be happy if I could write a single sentence like Gibbon. Like James, he had a grand style—it can't even be parodied.

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INTERVIEWER

So your memoirs are your next project?

EDEL

Yes, I'm very much absorbed in the problem of how to handle the story of my own life.

—**Jeanne McCulloch**

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Edmund Wilson in the Fifties: *La Douceur de la vie*

Leon Edel

"Nothing but deaths," Edmund Wilson writes in his journals at the beginning of the fifties, when he was haunted by a fantasy that he too might die before his time. Edna Millay had just died—she had seemed dead when he visited her during the 1940s. Christian Gauss, his mentor at Princeton, had dropped dead in Pennsylvania Station while waiting for the Princeton train. His mother had died, recently, of old age, her life in a manner fulfilled. She at least had known "duration." Edmund had been distanced from her early by her chronic deafness; but even without her poor hearing she had proved too prosaic for her overbright son. She would have liked him to be a quiet, ordinary boy who might go with her to the football games and do all the conventional things in their corner of New Jersey. She hadn't approved of his being a writer and never read him. She was devoted to her gardens; she had

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her house, her car, her chauffeur, her loyal servant, and had lived into her eighties. Edna Millay had been Edmund's troubled and troubling early love, and the ups and downs of their intermittent affair are reflected in his novel *I Thought of Daisy* and in the memoir he now wrote about her. Assembling his literary writings of the twenties and thirties, which he called *The Shores of Light*, he let the memoir stand as an epilogue, a kind of final shutting of the gate on his passionate past. At the beginning of the book—as a prologue—he placed his tribute to Gauss, who had made him feel the importance of human expression in literature, made him aware of continental writers and the power of language and symbol. In his epitaph for Gauss he quotes Dante's lines to his teacher, Brunetto Latini, *la cara e buona image paterna** —"the dear and kind paternal image"—thus naming Gauss as a kind of second father, the father of his intellect. The two memoirs enclose the "shores of light"—the precious decades that had forged Wilson's critical power—as in a felt and permanent embrace.

With his mother's death, Wilson inherited the family's upstate house—the Old Stone House, as it was called. Situated in Talcottville, a village of some eighty persons, in the lower range of the Adirondacks, it had been begun in 1800, the year after George Washington's death, and was completed in 1804. Its huge beams showed ravage; there were the inevitable accumulations of cobwebs and mildew; in places the plaster on the Sugar River limestone, from the ancestral quarry, was crumbling. But it was a splendid, solid house, with large rooms and chaste and elegant fireplaces; there were two stories of wide windows and a full-length verandah on each story. The house had survived, in its rural grandeur, from the childhood of the American Republic.

At certain periods in its history it had served, in the midst of being a dwelling, as a town hall, a post office, a social center. Outlying buildings had included a dairy, a quilting room, and a spinning room where three maids spun constantly. There had

* Inferno XV, 83

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also been a large ballroom. In addition to their homespun clothes, the ancestors had produced their own nails and candles and other household necessities. They dealt in land, built a mill, sold grist from their harvests and produce from the farms. With his usual curiosity, Edmund started reading local history and talking to family relations in the neighborhood. Once he had put up work space in the house, he began to study deeds, genealogy, real estate records, wills. Everything about his mother's family interested him. In one of his Christmas poems sent to his friends he told the family history:

> The Talcotts, Tories at that date,
> Resided here in feudal state . . .
> Another role was Thomas Baker's,
> Who broke and sold the Talcott acres.

There had been disputes, squabbles, litigation. The Talcotts and the Bakers feuded like the Montagues and Capulets but without the Shakespearian mayhem and finally reconciled proprietory differences in various intermarriages.

His father, Edmund Wilson, Sr., a successful lawyer, had bought the Old Stone House for his wife. She was descended from the feuding families of the Kimballs and Mathers, including the celebrated Cotton Mather, and she always called herself Helen Mather Kimball Wilson. The family had brought Edmund Jr. to Talcottville long before he had learned to speak, and as he grew he found the Old Stone House "a magical world." He remembered bedtime stories in the hushed country twilight and the active days of his boyhood roaming in the wild woodland. Later when he was in prep school, the Adirondacks bored him; he wanted to be with his schoolmates. His mother had continued to summer there during her widowhood, but Edmund returned upstate now to find that the old magicality was reasserting itself. As he crossed the threshold he felt that he walked not only into his personal past but into almost two hundred years of American history. His books were still on the shelves. On the tops of the bookcases he could see his old trophies of travel—some Mexican gods, a plaster gargoyle lugged home from Paris; models of various animals; a stuffed yellow bird bor-

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The Old Stone House.

dered with blue and orange beads bought from an Indian woman in Canada. These relics of his younger self made him feel acutely that he was a part of continuing history. He had ceased to be a detached and roving bohemian.

Periodically he sorted out the accumulations—they were a kind of repository of ancient domesticities: comb-back chairs, bed quilts in bright and faintly phallic patterns, engravings of George Washington, a clutter of spinning wheels, a stuffed heron. There were perforated tin boxes, the foot-warmers of another day during sleigh-rides or the Sunday sermon, like those in Balzac's *Eugénie Grandet*, and all kinds of bric-a-brac: dried rose leaves in glass jars, an old wooden flute, bootjacks that had been handled by ancestral hands and—most amusing of all—a convenient little footstool with a little wooden flap. When you pressed the flap you found it contained a cuspidor.

By the middle 1950s, the Old Stone House, renovated and partly modernized, had become a fixed part of Edmund Wilson's life. His frame house in the New England style at Wellfleet was the center of his achieved domestication during his fourth mar-

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riage to his European wife, Elena Mumm. It had comfortable large rooms and to the rear a very large room which was his library and an adjoining study. Here he spent autumns and winters and early spring. When the northern winds from Canada ceased and the ground thawed, he was driven (for he had never learned to drive) to Talcottville, a six-hour trip, to spend his summers as of old, in the house of his ancestors. The many pages in these journals devoted to his Adirondack life were turned into a book a dozen years later—*Upstate*—which tells in considerable detail this phase of Wilson's life during his later years.

In the journals, we can spend long indolent afternoons with the contented Edmund Wilson. He is in a deck chair between two trees and commands an affectionate view of the distant blue hills. In the foreground, he lazily watches a butterfly catch the sun's blaze in its wings as it flies high into an elm filled with swallows. His eyes follow the squirrels or chipmunks across the roof of the Stone House and he feels an extraordinary freedom—"of that realm of tree-top, roof and sky"—a soaring into high space and timelessness. This kind of relaxation and beatitude is new to him—the French sometimes speak of it as *la douceur de la vie*, the Italians *la dolce vita*. Wilson's mood is classical; he might be a writing Roman with his large senatorial head, and thick body, escaping from the Imperial city for rustication. He had never dreamed of such harmonies in his crowded Greenwich Village days, or during his subsequent troubled marriages.

Elena Wilson did not like the Old Stone House. Far from finding *douceur* in it, she complained of the altitude; it made her nervous and indeed she probably suffered from high blood pressure. Moreover, she was a sea person and she missed the smell of the ocean and the swimming at Wellfleet. Edmund, on his side, expressed delight at escaping from the Cape's tourist wave, the cars pushing their way to Provincetown during summers. Elena insisted she saw ghosts; and the house smelled too much of the dead past. She never stayed very long, but retreated to Wellfleet feeling a little as if Edmund were being unfaithful to her in burying himself in the post-revolutionary

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past. She allowed that perhaps this was a good way for her husband to unwind from his intense literary preoccupations at Wellfleet. *Upstate* candidly describes this annual awkwardness between the two, their divided loyalties in their two houses. But for Edmund, Talcottville was more than a place to unwind; it was a place where he could reclaim his selfhood and do "prodigies" of writing. That too was a part of the *douceur.*

Edmund Wilson wrote only two books during the fifties but five others were brought together, containing earlier periodical writings and some new material. These were scrupulously edited and revised and had the double effect of shoring up his scattered work while generating much-needed revenue. His arrangement with *The New Yorker* brought in substantial income, but he traveled to other parts of the country, and his trips to Europe—there were two in the fifties—were invariably depleting, financially. And then he had perhaps too cavalierly (deploring the small earnings of serious writers) refused to bother with record-keeping on behalf of the Internal Revenue Service. His struggle with the IRS belongs to later consideration with his book on the cold war and the income tax; but, with the threat of prosecution and the heavy penalties imposed, he seemed committed, to the end of his days, to reducing a formidable debt of the kind Mark Twain had to reduce by lecturing and Walter Scott by incessant production.

The five collections of earlier writings were *Classics and Commercials* (1950); *The Shores of Light* (1952); *Five Plays* (1954); his "studies in four civilizations," *Red, Black, Blond and Olive* (1956); and his political and social reportage, *The American Earthquake* (1958). In addition he wrote *The Scrolls from the Dead Sea* (1955) and a miscellany of essays, *A Piece of My Mind: Reflections at Sixty* (1956). He was also working at two other books, his ongoing study of the Civil War and his book about the Iroquois.

It was as if he was putting his house of letters into order, as well as the house of life. The assembled writings of the past represented a gathering-in of large segments of his forty years of existence as an articulate voice in America, from the assembled literary pieces to those that had dealt with ways of life

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in other countries, minorities and the chaos of America itself through the depression, the Rooseveltian era and the period of reaction that set in after the second war. A feature of these books was Wilson's willingness to acknowledge previous errors and correct them, his tendency to add passages enlarging old ideas, and his general flexibility when compared with certain eminent critics who carefully guarded their "consistency" and indulged in tergiversation, seeking to be always in the right. Only a man with a distinct personality and a large interest in all facets of human life and endeavor, possessing Wilson's intensity and search for truth, could give his past writings this kind of importance. The integration of his writings, their vivid reorganization as "literary chronicles," which gave them historical significance, the infusion of new material, endowed his volumes with distinct values for future generations. All of them remain in print.

The year of his sixtieth birthday, 1955, was the watershed of his private life during this decade, and *A Piece of My Mind* reflects certain hauntings and anxieties. The disappearance of his own generation brought fantasies of death and a particular poignancy of fear at the moment when he had belatedly taken possession of his little kingdoms on the Cape and in the Adirondacks. The mood of this book is testamentary, a kind of bequeathing of world-weariness, disillusion, the perversities of history, and a declaration of his will to live in spite of his disenchantment. The book inquires into his resistances to the twentieth century and the attractiveness of the eighteenth century—for he not only resisted the new machines, the television and the radio, but he felt himself to be locked in "a pocket of the past"—he whose earlier years had seemed so highly contemporaneous. His series of short essays in this book—on war, the USA, religion, the Russians, sex, the Jews, education, science—are brief homilies about life's confusion and its *douceurs.* They read like the work of a liberal newspaper columnist and, for all their lucidity and charm, are superficial and devoid of the hard thought to be found in his other writings. They seem, until one reaches the final essay, the informal chatter of

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a mature and meditative man of letters, in his slippers by his fireside.

The final essay redeems this book and explains its part in his life of the fifties. Entitled "The Author at Sixty," it pays only indirect attention to himself, but is a brilliant sketch of his father, Edmund Wilson, Sr. The essay seems to me to belong with the significant writings of the past by sons about their fathers. But many of these reflect a quarrel between the generations. Edmund has no quarrel—and his portrait is a mixture of filial affection and a certain bewilderment. He finds it difficult to reconcile the man he admired, whose probity and clarity of mind he compares with Lincoln's, and his power as a legal figure, with his frequent lapses into melancholy, during which he committed himself to sanitariums. He paints his father's aristocratic and gentry leanings, so like his own, and his democratic roots in the foundations of American history; his ability to meet people from all walks of life, his deep sympathy with minorities, not least the blacks, his love for the American scene, his abiding interest in cities and men—all these qualities and actions which his son had carried into his literary and historical writings.

The differences between the father and the son resided in Edmund Jr. overcoming his own lapse into depression during his younger years, perhaps because he could lean on his mother's down-to-earth ways which made her so little able to keep pace with the father's active humanism. Edmund Sr. had been Attorney General of New Jersey. He had jailed the corrupt bosses of the Atlantic seaboard and President Woodrow Wilson had planned to name him to the Supreme Court, but no vacancy had occurred. He had lost only one case in his entire career. Edmund Jr. describes his father's way of working up his court presentations—very much as the son later worked up his documentary essays. The essay pictures for us not only a successful man undermined by his inner "wound" but the sad and disjointed marriage that resulted and the dilemma it created for its only child. We are given thus the tap roots of the son's imagination, his ability to live himself into the past as few historians have done, while maintaining a cool detachment (as

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his father had done); his supreme power of summary and utterance—qualities of both literature and the law. There is an extraordinary tenderness in the paternal portrait which those who knew the more brusque and catankerous side of Edmund Jr. may not be able to reconcile or recognize. The writer had exceptional qualities of generosity and benignity. Many younger men now reaching middle age remember how kind he could be and gentle even when he was being highly critical. This generosity was one of his finest attributes, and it seems also to have been a source of his great attractiveness to women. Toward the end of his magisterial essay in *A Piece of My Mind* Edmund lights up for us the deepest reasons that led him to the writing of this book:

> My father's career had its tragic side—he died in his sixty-first year. I have been in some ways more fortunate—I am writing this in my sixty-second. And yet to have got through with honor that period from 1880 to 1920!—even at the expense of the felt-muted door, the lack of first class companionship, the retreats into sanitariums. I have never been obliged to do anything so difficult. Yet my own generation in America has not had so gay a journey as we expected when we first started out. In repudiating the materialism and the priggishness of the period in which we were born, we thought we should have a free hand to refashion American life as well as to have more fun than our fathers. But we, too, have had our casualties. Too many of my friends are insane or dead or Roman Catholic converts—and some of these among the most gifted; two have committed suicide. I myself had an unexpected breakdown when I was in my middle thirties. It was pointed out to me then that I had reached exactly the age at which my father had first passed into the shadow. I must have inherited from him some strain of his neurotic distemper, and it may be that I was influenced by unconscious fear lest I might be doomed to a similar fate. I did not recover wholly for years, and there were times when I was glad to reflect that I had covered more than half of my threescore and ten—"on the home stretch," I used to phrase it in reassuring myself. But now I am farther along, I find I want to keep on living.

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This then is what haunted Edmund Wilson at the approach of his sixtieth year; this had been the prompting of his autobiographical book. But the ominous deadline had come and gone. He was now older than his father had been at the time of his death. He could take repossession, as it were, of his life. The period of faltering was over. And in a passage in his journals he fills out the thoughts we read between the lines of *A Piece of My Mind*. He had endured. "In my sixty-first year, I find that one of the things that most gratifies me is the sense of my continuity . . . I feel at moments, when I'm living here alone [at Talcottville] that it's all myself and nothing else—house, village and Lewis County. I might get tired of the beautiful view from my door if I didn't feel it was also mine, a part of my habitat, imagination, thought, personality." Those acres which Thomas Baker broke and sold seem to have been recovered: his imagination annexes the surrounding countryside to the durable Old Stone House and there has been a recovery of selfhood. Edmund Wilson has reacquired a future, however long or short it may be.

Once, long before, when he was still a small boy, being driven by his parents home from nearby Boonville, he had said to himself, "I am a poet." Then the critic-to-be in little Edmund took over. "No, I'm not quite a poet, but I am something of the kind." And indeed his young self had prophesied his old self—as in a cartoon by Beerbohm—a writer, a polymath, whose prose, as has been said, was always written not "at" but "to" the reader. Now he sits in his upstate realm like an ancient Roman renewing his selfhood and having his *villégiature*—allowing irritations, irascibilities, torments, and fragmentations to melt together into the mellowness of aging.

"La Douceur de la vie" by Leon Edel. © 1986 by Leon Edel. Used by arrangement with Farrar, Straus & Giroux. A longer version appears as the introduction to *The Fifties*, volume IV of Edmund Wilson's journals, edited by Leon Edel, to be published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux in May, 1986.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

M.F. Beal is the author of a book of essays, *Safe House* (NW-Matrix), and the novels *Amazon One* (Atlantic/Little Brown), which won the Atlantic Grant Award, and *Angel Dance.* Her work has appeared in *Fiction International*, *The American Book Review*, and *Best American Short Stories* of 1972. She lives in Oregon.

Allan Gurganus is completing a novel entitled *Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All* (Knopf). He teaches at Sarah Lawrence College and recently received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. **Bruce Saylor** recently conducted the premiere of his composition *The Waves* in Paris. He teaches at the Aaron Copeland School of Music at Queens College.

Robert Stone is the author of the novels *A Hall of Mirrors*, *Dog Soldiers*, for which he won the 1975 National Book Award, and *A Flag for Sunrise.* "The Ascent of Mount Carmel" is an excerpt from *Children of Light*, which Knopf will publish in March 1986.

POETRY

Yehuda Amichai is generally considered Israel's leading poet. The poems in this issue will appear in a new collection of his work to be published by Harper & Row in the spring of 1986. Amichai's translator, **Stephen Mitchell**, won the 1983 Harold Morton Landon Translation Prize of the Academy of American Poets for his *Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke.* His translations of

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Rilke's *Sonnets of Orpheus* and *The Lay of the Love and Death of Cornet Christopher Rilke* were recently published by Simon & Schuster.

Jim Carroll's collection of poems, *The Book of Nods*, will be published next year by Viking Penguin. He is the author of *Living at the Movies* and *The Basketball Diaries*, and has recorded several albums of music.

Killarney Clary lives in California and is the author of *By This, By Any, Can and Can't Be Done.*

Dick Davis lives in Aylsham, Norfolk. His latest book, *The Covenant*, was published by Anvil Press.

Michael Hofmann's first book, *Nights in the Iron Hotel*, was published by Faber & Faber in 1983. The second, *Acrimony*, will appear next summer. He lives in London.

James Laughlin's *Selected Poems* will be published next year by City Lights. His work also appeared in issues 89 and 94 of *The Paris Review.*

Ann Lauterbach lives in New York. Her most recent book, *Sacred Weather*, was published in 1984 by the Grenfell Press. She is a contributing editor of *Conjunctions* magazine and teaches in the MFA program at Brooklyn College. Her next collection, *Before Recollection*, will be published in 1986 by Princeton University Press.

Cynthia Nadelman is an art critic and a contributing editor of *ARTnews*. This is her first published poem.

Stanley Plumly's most recent book is *Summer Celestial*, published by Ecco Press. He teaches at the University of Houston.

Donald Revell teaches English and Creative Writing at the University of Denver. A collection of his poems, *From the Abandoned Cities*, was published in 1983 by Harper & Row.

Vittorio Sereni's latest book, *Stella Variabile*, was published by Garzanti in 1981. His translator, **Ann Snodgrass**, currently teaches at the University of Utah. Her poems have appeared in *The Antioch Review*, *The Sonora Review*, *Telescope*, and *The Carolina Quarterly*. She is also the recipient of the PEN American Center's 1985 Renato Poggioli Award for her translation of Sereni.

Robert B. Shaw teaches at Mount Holyoke College and is the author of several books of poetry.

Cynthia Zarin lives in New York. Her work has appeared in *The New Yorker* and other magazines.

FEATURE

Leon Edel is the author of the five-volume *Life of Henry James*; a revised and condensed one-volume edition, *Henry James: A Life*, was published this fall by Harper & Row. He is the recipient of the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award, and the Gold Medal for Biography. "La Douceur de la vie" is an excerpt from his introduction to the fourth volume of Ed-

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mund Wilson's journals, *The Fifties*, edited by Edel, which Farrar, Straus & Giroux will publish this spring.

INTERVIEWS

Jeanne McCulloch is the managing editor of *The Paris Review*. Her work has appeared in *Artforum*, *The New York Times Book Review*, and *Vogue*. She is working on a collection of short stories.
William Crawford Woods is a novelist and a journalist who teaches at Longwood College in Virginia.

ART

George Condo was born in New Hampshire in 1957 and lives in New York and Paris. His paintings and drawings have been recently exhibited at Galerie Bruno Bischofberger, Zurich, Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York, and Museum Folkwang, Essen.
Robert Greene was born in 1953 and lives in New York. His paintings and drawings have been exhibited at Tracey Garet Gallery, New York, Galeria Leyendeker, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, and Robert Miller Gallery, New York.
Andreas Schulze was born in Hannover in 1955 and currently lives in Cologne. Recent one-man exhibitions of paintings have been held at Galerie Monika Spruth, Cologne, and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York, and group exhibitions at the Tate Gallery, London, and The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Philip Taaffe was born in 1955 in New Jersey and lives in New York. His work has been shown at Galerie Ascan Crone, Hamburg, Galerie Rudolf Zwirner, Cologne, and Pat Hearn Gallery, New York.

NOTICE

The judges of *The Paris Review*'s Summer Writers Workshop Prize did not feel the entries were sufficiently finished to qualify for publication. The magazine will offer the same prize for the 1986 summer sessions.

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HAPPY AS A DOG'S TAIL

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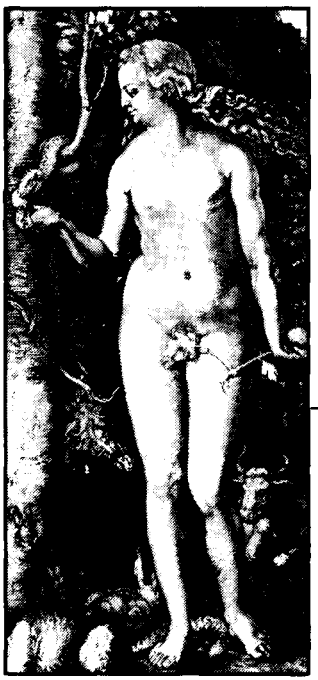

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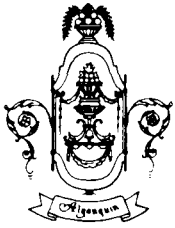

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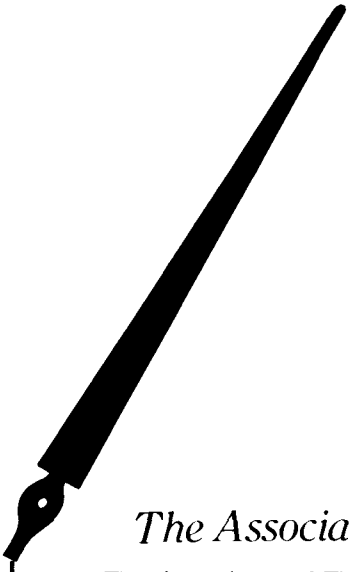

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